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Interviews with
Macedonian Presidential Candidates

The Macedonians: Their Past & Present



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Letter to the Readers

Dear readers and friends,

We are so pleased to bring to you the new and revived *UMD Voice* magazine. A huge thank you goes to UMD Tennessee representative, and *UMD Voice*'s new designer Nikola Cuculovski, for volunteering to lead the rebranding and progressive look of our premier publication. *We are sure you will all agree that Nikola has done a fantastic job!* Together with Nikola and our team of writers, we hope to produce a more frequent publication for all of you to enjoy time and again.

Given the timeliness of Macedonia's elections, we bring to you interviews with the presidential candidates, like we did in 2009, on their views on domestic and foreign policies of the country, but also brain drain effect, challenges, and opportunities. For the first-time ever, Macedonians

abroad will have the right to vote in the Presidential elections on April 12th, and for the second time, in the Parliamentary elections on April 26th. I encourage all, who can, to exercise their right to vote.

We have a great line-up of different articles and topics. Our cover story of Washington's new faces in real estate is a treat.



Stojan Nikolov
Chairman,
UMD Board of Directors



Metodija A. Koloski
Co-Founder and President, UMD

We hope to feature more positive role models for our youth and community, like Blaze and Bojan, in future issues.

We would love to get your feedback on what you think of *UMD Voice* and ways how we can improve it. What do you want to read in future issues of *UMD Voice*? Can you volunteer to write articles? Please e-mail us at ***UMDVoice@umdiaspora.org***.

Enjoy the read,

Stojan Nikolov
Chairman, UMD Board of Directors

Metodija A. Koloski
Co-Founder and President, UMD





Meet Blaze & Bojan

From Immigrants to D.C.'s New Faces of Real Estate

Throughout 2014, UMD will feature rising stars in the global Macedonian community and conduct interviews with them as part of a Macedonian professionals series to be published on our website, as well as in future issues of UMD Voice magazine. The first in the series of interviews is with Blaze Dimov and Bojan Peovski. We hope you enjoy the interview below.



Washington, D.C. is one of the United States' fastest-growing real estate markets, and Realington, and its capital-raising arm, Realington Capital, are the new faces imprinting their names in D.C.'s real estate investment and development scene. At the head of the Realington family are two Arlington residents who immigrated from Macedonia, Blaze Dimov and Bojan Peovski.

Blaze Dimov, the President of Realington and Principal of Realington Capital, is responsible for property acquisitions and dispositions as well as overall investment strategy. A graduate of George Mason University, Blaze began his career in the construction and real estate industries seven years ago and for the last six he has been a licensed real estate professional and an active investor, specializing in short sale and foreclosure transactions. Blaze holds a Distressed Property Expert Certification (DPEC) and Short Sales and Foreclosure Resource (SFR) certification.

Bojan Peovski, the Managing Partner of Realington and Principal of Realington Capital, is responsible for the financial strength of the company, technology, operations, and new ventures. Bojan's key competencies are project planning and financing and day-to-day operations to ensure a healthy business. A graduate of University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, he began his career in the IT industry at Sapient Corporation.



Blaze Dimov
President of Realington and
Principal of Realington Capital.





Bojan has accumulated more than five years of experience in project planning and financing in both real estate and technology sectors and has been in the real estate business for the past three years.

With offices at the National Harbor, D.C. area's newest landmark development, Realington is focused on acquisition of residential, condominium, and multi-family properties located in the Washington metro area, covering D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Years after the housing market crashed, recovering communities continue to grapple with a glut of vacant properties, which drag down property values, attract vandals and drain public resources. Blaze and Bojan together with their team are helping to rebuild communities affected by the crisis, offering ready to move-in homes to a new generation of responsible homeowners.

The author and founder of Jobenomics Chuck Vollmer had this to say about their work "I endorse Realington as a model company in the Jobenomics Real Estate Initiative that is focused on small business creation related to renovation of distressed and foreclosed properties. Jobenomics plans to use the Realington model in other cities across the USA."

UMD: In just a short period of time, you have established yourselves in the Washington metro area. What prompted you to leave Macedonia and immigrate to the United States?

Blaze: My departure from Macedonia was mainly prompted by the desire to continue my education abroad. The U.S. was my first choice. I obtained a visa in 2001 and arrived here the same year. I was surprised by how expensive the education in the U.S. was when I arrived. The first few years were a real struggle because I attended school full-time while working full-time simultaneously. Of course, the cultural shock is a big burden at the beginning, but with time you adapt to the new environment.

Bojan: Even before arriving to the U.S., I had already spent significant amount of time living outside of Macedonia. I grew up in Poland, spent several months in the UK, was an exchange student in Seattle for a year, and subsequently studied in Spain for two years before arriving in the U.S. So, it came fairly natural for me to continue living abroad and to further challenge myself to achieve more and to pursue success. The U.S. was a logical choice in that sense.

UMD: Blaze, can you tell our readers more about your beginnings in the real estate market? What made you transfer from construction to real estate, and why property acquisition?

Blaze: I actually entered real estate by accident, a real accident. In the fall 2007, I was playing tennis and got injured. Staying home for more than a month, I got bored, so a friend of mine gave me the idea to get into real estate because in his words "real estate was doing very well." I took his advice. I got licensed and entered the real estate business the next year. Looking back, the timing was probably not the best, as a few months after I formed my first company the biggest financial crisis hit since the Great Depression. The next year was even worst, but I didn't pay too much attention to this. I worked the hardest I could and stayed focused. It paid off. While there were few decades-old companies in real estate that were going out of business, my company managed to survive and increase its business. In 2010, I partnered with Bojan and business became even better. A retired business owner, and a friend of mine, later told me that it was maybe better that I started in real estate during a recession because I could not afford mistakes and that was the best training one can get.

Construction was only a temporary position for me because the work schedule suited my school schedule well, and helped me pay for my education. Although, a temporary position, it gave me the beginning knowledge for my future work, particularly since our current operation is a mix of real estate investments and construction.





When I first entered real estate sales, I realized there was a small problem – I was a terrible sales person. Whenever a property was not worth buying, I would be frank with my clients. Somehow that attitude didn't work well with my bosses. It was soon after I decided to start my own business in property acquisitions.

UMD: Bojan, you made a leap from IT to real estate. Why the change? Why the decision to go into an industry that was probably hurting the most due to the crisis?

Bojan: I always had an innate appreciation for real estate, but it wasn't until Blaze and I did our first investment that I really got hooked, and it all happened by accident, if you will. Blaze was helping me as an agent to find a condo to buy in Washington, DC. I was disappointed with the available inventory, and when Blaze suggested that we instead buy an investment property, I didn't think twice. IT products and services, and in particular software, tend to be intangible — they cannot be touched or grasped in the physical world. In contrast, real estate is something that's very tangible, and it's that aspect that attracted me to real estate initially.

I'm going to start by quoting Warren Buffett: "*Be fearful when others are greedy and greedy when others are fearful.*" When it comes to investing, it all depends on what side of the equation you are on. We were able to spot the right opportunities, in the right locations, at the right time.

Every market brings its unique opportunities and challenges, and it's a matter of positioning oneself to best take advantage of the opportunities and successfully navigate through the challenges.

UMD: What are some of the biggest challenges you have faced in doing business in the D.C. metro area?

Blaze: The Washington Metropolitan area is different than many other areas in U.S. We have a high presence of U.S. government jobs here that makes it a liquid market. It is a more stable market compared to the rest of the country, which makes investors more willing to invest here. Some real estate based businesses can grow with higher rates

compared with the rest of the country because of the high circulation of people. On the other side we have higher competition because some of the brightest real estate business minds in the country have a presence here. In my opinion, this is good because competition makes you stronger.

UMD: The economic crisis substantially hit the U.S. real estate industry substantially. As young and accomplished investors in real estate, what is your take on the current state of the real estate market? As we are slowly moving out of the storm caused by the housing bubble, do you see more opportunities in commercial or residential real estate?

Bojan: The opportunities will always be there. It's a matter of recognizing them and taking the action that will help seize the opportunities. And where there are opportunities, there exist limitations on resources, information, and knowledge to recognize such opportunities. The constraint on resources usually comes in the form of capital, but it may also be related to human resources — finding the right people to help you realize your goals. The real estate market, like most markets, is cyclical in nature. Since the housing bubble, home values have increased or stabilized in most markets. During the crisis, there was a pause in construction and purchasing activity and now that real estate is making a come back, construction and purchasing activity is on the rise, helped by historically low interest rates. I think that trend will continue into the next year. For us, as the market continues to stabilize, the opportunities in residential real estate may shift away from distressed properties to new construction, multi-family and condo conversion projects.

Blaze: The worst is over, however, there is a great political divide in Washington. This situation translates to uncertainty in the business community as well. I think that the American people will not tolerate status quo for a long time. It is not in their nature. Large political and economic reforms are on the horizon. When these reforms occur, in a few years in my opinion, it would be an ideal time to have a business presence in U.S.





UMD: *According to a recent survey we conducted of UMD members and supporters, the number one priority is to see Macedonia improve economically and attract direct foreign investments. Have you had any previous experience of doing business in Macedonia, or with Macedonian companies? If you have had any previous experiences, how would you then compare the business climate between Macedonia and the United States, and what would your recommendations be for further improvement of Macedonia's business climate?*

Blaze: So far we haven't done any business with Macedonian companies. However, our plans are to start doing business with companies from our motherland. We want to do it in two main directions: First, to hire design and architectural firms from Macedonia who would make designs for contemporary new homes built here in the U.S. Most of the homes built in this area have a colonial design. Through Realington, we would like to introduce new energy efficient homes with a contemporary European design. Second, to open a Realington office in Macedonia and hire talented people that would work there.

Bojan: Starting and operating a profitable business takes true grit — courage, resolve, and strength of character — as well as professional ethics to resolve problems that arise in a business environment. Macedonian businesses should focus on establishing stronger ethical principles when it comes to conducting business.

That should help create an environment of greater trust in which to conduct business in. Doing business without confidence in both the application of the law and your business partners is very difficult. Part of this responsibility lies with the government, but an important part also lies with the businesses themselves.

I've had previous experience starting a company in Macedonia, and it was a real challenge getting the business off the ground.

The primary challenge had to do with the overall economic conditions, the general lack of options to obtaining financing as a startup or small business, and even as simple as difficulties collecting payments on unpaid invoices. The most successful businesses in Macedonia today rely heavily on export of their products and services to companies abroad. For businesses that rely solely on the Macedonian market, it can be very challenging. The key to improving the overall business climate within the country lies somewhere between putting in place more favorable conditions for business to borrow money to grow and expand, more uniform application of the business law, and improving the overall economy.

UMD: *Does Realington plan on expanding outside of the D.C. metro area, and what are your future plans/goals?*

Bojan: The strength of the real estate market and the investment opportunities in the Washington, D.C./VA/MD region have been an important factor in our success to date.



Bojan Peovski
Managing Partner of Realington
and Principal of Realington Capital.





Readers must be familiar with the expression "location, location, location" when it comes to real estate. Knowing your real estate market is critical in making good investment decisions. That said, our plan is to continue investing exclusively in this area within the next two years to further establish us in this market before considering expanding to other markets.

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Realington has been growing organically every year since inception. In 2013, we introduced Realington Capital, a private real estate fund, to raise capital for projects in the area. As the local real estate market continues its recovery, investments may also include multi-family

units, condo conversions, and new construction of single-family dwellings.

UMD: Finally, what would you say to our readership about the American dream?

Blaze: We call it the American dream here, but it is pretty much the same dream around the world. The rules for success are universal. In business, it is extremely hard in the beginning. But this fact makes the whole journey more interesting. In my opinion, the combination that is needed for success in business is idea, hard work, integrity and persistence.

Everything starts from an idea. I would like to encourage anybody to dream big and work hard. These days a young person with an Internet connection in Macedonia has the same access to information as any young person in the U.S. That is power. I understand that the financial means to start business are much more limited in Macedonia, but one can start small and work with what one has. You never know when and where you will get your break. An idea will only stay an idea if it's not supported by hard work. One should also understand that there are many failures in business. It is an inevitable occurrence when you try something new. But the most important thing after failure is how fast can you stand up, dust off, and try again.

UMD: Blaze and Bojan – thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedules to answer these questions. UMD wishes you the best of luck and success with Realington, and we hope to see your names pop up more in Washington, D.C.'s real estate investment and development market.



Macedonian Presidential Elections '14

As we did during the 2009 Presidential Elections, UMD Voice is providing a glimpse into the Macedonian Presidential candidates, including the incumbent President Dr. Gjorge Ivanov, Dr. Stevo Pendarovski, Dr. Zoran Popovski. Below you will see UMD's questions and the candidate responses, notably on topics like Macedonia's economic situation, NATO and EU integration, Greece's problem with Macedonia's name, brain drain, as well as the role of the Macedonian Diaspora. On April 12th, Macedonian citizens abroad will be able to vote, for the first-time ever, in Macedonia's Presidential elections, which are scheduled for April 13th. Round two will take place on April 26th.

Candidate Interview with the incumbent President Dr. Gjorge Ivanov

UMD: What are your domestic goals and priorities for Macedonia and its citizens?

Ivanov: My main goals and priorities have been defined with the needs and the expectations of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia from the President. The President is elected to serve the citizens, to serve Macedonia. In accordance with this, my main goal is to build an economically prosperous Macedonia, to increase employment and raise the living standard. To make the pivotal state systems, the security, education, healthcare and the social system, comply with the European standards and be in line with the times and

the needs that are to come. To continue the centuries-old traditions of coexistence and respect for diversity. To preserve the traditional values. To make the Republic of Macedonia connected in infrastructure and energy. To integrate the country into NATO and the EU. To raise the level of good neighborly relations. To enter a new phase of regional cooperation by implementing joint projects. To strengthen the relations with our strategic partners and to build new friendships. To open new markets and prospects. Briefly, to build Macedonia in heights, with the highest values, the highest criteria and the highest standards.

UMD: How ready are you for constructive cohabitation with the executive government, whoever it is?

Ivanov: One of the prerequisites that would help fulfill the set goals and priorities is cooperation, constructive cohabitation, not only in the executive but also in the ***legislative power, with all other segments and institutions of the system.***



Dr. Gjorge Ivanov
President of Macedonia.





legislative power, with all other segments and institutions of the system. As President of the Republic of Macedonia, I have had so far regular and constructive cooperation with the Government and the Assembly. The President must not be an obstacle to the progressive policies of the Government and abuse his constitutional powers.

But rather, the President should support the progressive policies and be corrective instance of those policies that do not fully reflect the needs and interests of the citizens. Severe confrontations and cohabitation that the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia could witness in the past do not help at all. This only distances us from the set goals and priorities; it harms the international reputation of Macedonia. The institutions of the system must always function in full capacity and political dialogue and political debate must always be led in the state institutions, even in a situation of internal-political dispute.

UMD: Due to the growing rate of unemployment, many young people are leaving the country, especially those who have university education. What is your strategy for keeping these people in the country and reducing the "brain drain" from Macedonia?

Ivanov: I was a university professor before I assumed the office of the President. My dedication and the attention I am devoting to the young generations as President is something quite natural for me. Not at all did I need additional motivation to actively work on building a better future for the youth and on preparing the young generations to face everything the future brings.

Every society has a responsibility towards the future generations. The answer to this challenge, or as you call it strategy to halt the brain drain process, requires a complex systematic and coordinated approach and policies that are complementary. Prosperous future means a state that is safe, secure, integrated, open. Simultaneously, we must invest in a strong economy that will have the capacity to absorb a quality, professional and highly educated staff.

It is particularly important for the universities to monitor the situation and the needs of the labor market, to avoid overproduction of certain profiles at the expense of other profiles, which, in turn, we have to import from abroad.

Furthermore, employment must follow standards and criteria. Quality, professionalism and education must be respected, valued and recognized. Only appropriate individuals employed at appropriate positions could result in the desired progress of the country.

Throughout my term, I have constantly had meetings with members of the academia, professors, students, and business community representatives. I have attempted to establish a link and collaboration between the universities and the Macedonian companies for the purpose of recruiting staff from among the best-qualified students.

Providing the opportunity for the young talented and ambitious people from Macedonia to upgrade and improve their skills, to develop their creativity and managerial skills, we have founded the School for Young Leaders, which proved to be a very successful project. I believe, with this project, we have managed to keep many successful young people in Macedonia.

Knowing that innovation through technological development can be a powerful driver of the national economy, we have introduced the recognition for the best young scientist, as an encouragement for research activity among young people.

As I have said, there are several measures in this regard. It is a coordinated policy in multiple areas: economy, investment, education, science, universities, chambers, business community, they all have to work in partnership. As before, I am fully prepared to be partner with and help everyone in the future, too.

UMD: Macedonia needs investments to bolster its economic situation. What measures would you suggest to improve the economic status of the country?





Ivanov: Ever since the very first day of my term, I have joined the efforts made by the Government to provide for the economic growth and development of the country, by backing and joining the economic diplomacy. Thus, as President, I had the opportunity, to my pleasure, to have contacts, visits, meetings and to create a climate in which the Government and the business community in Macedonia will be able to successfully collaborate with governments and business communities of other countries. Every foreign country that I have visited, I was accompanied by businessmen, and, on my initiative, business forums were organized where Macedonian companies were presented and business cooperation with foreign companies was established. To clarify my role, or the role of the head of state in the economic diplomacy, I would like to mention a few specific examples.

My visits to Russia, China, Qatar, brought concrete results. Connecting Macedonia to the "South Stream" pipeline started back in 2010, during my official visit to the Russian Federation, when, along with the Deputy Prime Minister Stavrevski, we had the first meetings with the leadership of Gazprom. We have signed with China a Loan Agreement with favorable conditions for construction of the two highways: Skopje-Shtip and Kichevo-Ohrid, worth around USD 770 million.

We have managed to connect our companies with the business communities of all fast-growing economies in the world. We have opened Macedonia to the West and to the East. The economic agenda has taken us in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan and wherever our economy can have benefit. Today China is our important trading partner, and Qatar shows immense interest for investment and cooperation, confirming its plans with the opening of an embassy in Skopje.

Moreover, at all regional meetings I have pledged to enhance the infrastructure connectivity in our region. The connecting of the Adriatic-Ionian Highway to Corridor 8 and Corridor 10 is on the top of the agenda of the region, thanks to our efforts. Macedonia fulfills its part in this project, which will make the region a lot more attractive place for foreign investment.

This is only a part of the activities undertaken by me, as President, to join the efforts towards economic development of Macedonia. Ways to help always exist, if there is a desire and interest.

UMD: *One of the main priorities of Macedonia are the Euro- Atlantic integrations in EU and NATO. Although for several years, Macedonia has received positive comments about the implemented reforms in the country, it continues to wait outside the doors of EU and NATO. Where do you see your role in advocating the accession of Macedonian in EU and NATO?*

Ivanov: As President, I have worked hard to achieve our strategic goals, to unblock the integration processes. As a country often faced with double standards imposed on our European and Euro-Atlantic path, irrational blockades and blackmails, I have never lost my vision of a European and Euro-Atlantic Macedonia, even in such circumstances.

Throughout my term, I have been leading active international policy. I have had over 200 bilateral meetings with heads of state. More than 150 meetings with prime ministers, speakers and heads of diplomacy. During my tenure, I have had more than 100 meetings with other foreign dignitaries, with senior officials of international organizations and religious leaders. More than 100 official, business and informal visits and participation in international events. I have hosted over 40 official and working visits of heads of state to the Republic of Macedonia.

At all meetings with European leaders, I have been reminding that the European Union is incomplete project without Macedonia. I have been highlighting my vision of Pax Europeana, recalling the original idea of unification. I have been indicating that the integration of the Western Balkans into NATO is necessary because NATO is the strongest guarantor of peace and security in the region.

From my interlocutors I have sought application of European criteria towards Macedonia. Parallel movement in the process of resolving bilateral issue and the process of membership accession negotiation with the European Union needs to be applied in our case as well.





During my tenure, we have received confirmation that the Republic of Macedonia is ready to immediately become part of NATO, five consecutive recommendations that we are ready to start negotiations with the EU. I insist on respect of The Hague judgment. For us, unacceptable are the double standards practiced by the Alliance. It cannot underestimate the judgment of the most influential court in the world with blatant statements that it has no effect on NATO as an organization. In that case, NATO has questioned the respect for international law, thanks to which it actually functions, and has compromised the entire international order.

It is not possible for Macedonia to be one of the largest contributors to the NATO peacekeeping missions and to share responsibilities but not to enjoy privileges. Macedonia must take the place it deserves.

I have been persisted in the view that only as Macedonia and as Macedonians are we a benefit for Europe and the world. Wherever I went, whomever I met, at the most important global forums and at informal meetings, I have acknowledged the world with the truth and the arguments of Macedonia.

But things are changing. Following The Hague judgment, as we started talking with the strength of the arguments, with the language of human rights, the right to self-identification and to human dignity, with an active and credible foreign policy, the understanding and support for Macedonia from our partners in the European Union and NATO has started to increase. When you know you are right, you have faith to endure and never give up. Despite the status quo, we do not hesitate to create the European Union in Macedonia. We are not discouraged to work on the implementation of the EU reforms, on the achievement of the highest standards and criteria for the citizens. Thus, whenever the negotiations start, they will be reduced to a mere formality, and the EU membership issue will be reduced to a purely technical issue. It is important to keep working on it.

UMD: Greece's problem with Macedonia's name is another challenge that the country faces. What is your position regarding the dispute with Greece over the name "Macedonia" and where you see a possible solution?

Ivanov: As regards the name dispute, my position is consistent and clear. Many times I have said that a solution to the name issue is possible only by respecting international law and international agreements. This irrational issue can be overcome only if Greece remains consistent to the legal framework in which the process is led within the UN. Greece must respect the agreements it has signed, to respect the Interim Accord, the UN Security Council resolutions and the International Court of Justice ruling. We cannot accept talks on identity issues. We are and we cannot be anything else but Macedonians. And the language we speak is Macedonian. It is a reality we all need to accept. So, for us, only solution that will not change the Macedonian identity is acceptable. It implies that the Constitution remains unchanged. It is a solution that will not infringe our national, cultural and linguistic identity. The right to self-identification and the right to human dignity are human rights, which cannot be compromised.

UMD: One of the beauties of Macedonia is its historical multicultural diversity. What will your message be to protect this?

Ivanov: As President, I have been trying to be the voice of every Macedonian citizen, regardless of his ethnic, religious or any other affiliation. My main maxim is integration without assimilation. And we all have equal responsibility: to continue the centuries-old tradition of coexistence and respect for diversity. With our unique model of respect for diversity, we can offer Europe, and the region, a lot. We want nothing more and nothing less than the other European nations and states. We want to be respected. I urge all to appreciate the Macedonian identity and the identities of all Macedonian citizens equally as their identity. Macedonia is an example of unity in diversity, in which everyone can be different, but must be equal in rights and duties.





UMD: What would you convey to the Macedonian citizens if you were elected as president of the Republic of Macedonia?

Ivanov: I would like to convey them that, with even greater enthusiasm and energy, I will work on achieving my vision. Only united we can do a lot for the Republic of Macedonia to progress and become a respected country in Europe and worldwide. Therefore, every one, individually and consciously, should contribute to the achievement of our common goals. Only with sincere faith, perseverance and work can we achieve our goals.

UMD: Where do you see the role of the Diaspora and what is your message to them?

Ivanov: For a country, such as the Republic of Macedonia, the Diaspora can play a major role in the international affirmation and promotion of the state in many aspects. One of those aspects is certainly the contribution of the Diaspora for the economic development of Macedonia, first through direct investment, second by promoting Macedonia's economic potentials and investment benefits to the local business community. Furthermore, the Diaspora can play a key role in promoting political goals of the state, through advocacy and defense of our foreign policy and strategic interests.

We have seen that before the Chicago Summit, the Diaspora has made every effort, organized itself and lobbied massively for Macedonia's admission to NATO. Through letters, meetings with senior officials of their respective countries, the Diaspora has promoted and defended the Macedonian standpoints in order to reach a better position for Macedonia, which has made me extremely grateful, as President.

Third, by organizing various events, by acting through various cultural associations, the Diaspora has influenced not only the promotion but also the preservation of the Macedonian culture and tradition and the Macedonian identity. With this, you are a role model that should be followed by this and by the coming generations of Macedonians in the Diaspora.

Thus, the Macedonian Diaspora actually makes the Macedonian citizen a friend and a neighbor with everyone. In the past 5 years, in almost all of my visits to foreign countries, I have never forgotten the Macedonian communities. That the Republic of Macedonia evaluates the contribution of the Diaspora can be witnessed in the fact that I, as President, have bestowed many deserving, and forgotten too, individuals and organizations from the Diaspora, for their contribution to Macedonia, on behalf of the citizens, by symbolically awarding them with state recognitions. This is my project, named "Macedonia Remembers". I am particularly pleased that the support of the Macedonian communities throughout the world is growing.

On this occasion, I would like to say to the Diaspora to be further active and engaged in the promotion of our country. Your role has been recognized and highly appreciated by Macedonia and by me, as President. After long, we have managed to provide the Diaspora with the right to vote in the presidential and parliamentary elections in the Republic of Macedonia and to have its deputies within the Macedonian Assembly.

SAVE THE DATE

September 20, 2014
Canadian Macedonian Place and
United Macedonian Diaspora Tribute Gala
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Presidential Candidate Interview with Dr. Stevo Pendarovski

UMD: What are your domestic goals and priorities for Macedonia and its citizens?

Pendarovski: Were I to be elected a President, my first task and duty would be to restore the dignity of the institution President of the Republic of Macedonia. As far as I am concerned, the citizens are going to be of key interest in the performance of my duties as well as the basic censor in the making of the best decisions for the present and the future of our state. I shall stand at the forefront of the line of the poor and the deprived, so that we can start the battle for democratic changes, jointly with all true patriots who desire different and proud Macedonia. Macedonia, which belongs to all who live in her, as well as to all Macedonian citizens abroad. A country of free people, in which each and every individual, which works, honestly will be able to enjoy a life of dignity. A country respected by both its own citizens and the international community. A country that would make proud both the revolutionaries of the blind uprising and the partisans. A country in which our children and grandchildren will plan their future.

UMD: How ready are you for constructive cohabitation with the executive government, whoever it is?

Pendarovski: Absolutely, that is a constitutional obligation and duty towards the citizens who are entrusting the President with this most responsible office in the state. My goal is to be a President who will act as a guardian of the Constitution, protector of the citizens and unifying force of the nation.

I shall not waver in confronting any misuse of power, in protecting the citizens from the pressure of those who have lost all contact with reality.

UMD: Due to the growing rate of unemployment, many young people are leaving the country, especially those who have university education. What is your strategy for keeping these people in the country and reducing the "brain drain" from Macedonia?

Pendarovski: Macedonia has to have, nay, it should have defined long ago a national policy concerning this issue of vital interest for the state. The young people, especially highly educated ones, as well as all experts in any field, are needed by this country like anything. They are the factor without which neither the democratic processes, nor the economic development of the country can be moved from the stalemate. The President of the state might not hold direct authority in this area, but I shall not sit idly and silently observe how Macedonia is turning into a country of profound social differences, into a country, which continuously generates citizens dependent on welfare and economic immigrants.

UMD: Macedonia needs investments to bolster its economic situation. What measures would you suggest to improve the economic status of the country?

Pendarovski: This is a question which, over and above all, is included into the scope of the competences of the Government and its different departments, but because it bears the meaning of a factor which generates development and rule of law, the President of the state must undertake the role of motivational factor which strongly contributes to the creation of auspicious atmosphere for inflow and efficient utilization of domestic and foreign investments.



Dr. Stevo Pendarovski
Presidential Candidate





Pendarovski: In this context, I perceive as especially important the role of the Macedonians settled all over the world, whose concern for the homeland should be instrumental in creating most advantageous conditions for the fastest possible economic development of the country. Indeed, science also confirms that all reforms and programs of the economic policies found their adequacy and potentiality for implementation upon the growth of the intensity of the investments.

UMD: *One of the main priorities of Macedonia are the Euro- Atlantic integrations in EU and NATO. Although for several years, Macedonia has received positive comments about the implemented reforms in the country, it continues to wait outside the doors of EU and NATO. Where do you see your role in advocating the accession of Macedonian in EU and NATO?*

Pendarovski: The active participation in the improvement of the international reputation of the Republic of Macedonia in the region and in the world, as well as the integration of the country in the EU, as consensually ascertained strategic goals, will be among the key priorities in my daily activities as the future President. As a matter of fact, these issues are part of the body of competences and responsibilities of the chief of state, determined by the Constitution. What is even more important is that the European and Euro-Atlantic integrations of the Republic of Macedonia are directly connected with the stability of the country and the progress of the democratic reforms in many key sectors of life and business pursuit – which are so much requisite for Macedonia – and, of course, with the dearly expected economic prosperity. My past experiences concerning the possibilities that could opening up for our country on that road are filling me with realistic enthusiasm to do everything I can in order to utilize, as the President of the state, all my capacities and personal abilities for the goal of promoting our dedication, but also the comparative advantages for the Union and NATO, but above all for the stability of the region and the improvement of good neighborly cooperation, which Macedonia would be able to contribute with its membership in these two extremely important organizations.

UMD: *Greece's problem with Macedonia's name is another challenge that the country faces. What is your position regarding the dispute with Greece over the name "Macedonia" and where you see a possible solution?*

Pendarovski: That is an imposed bilateral problem, which unjustly puts pressure and slows down our integration processes, of whose importance I just spoke. The solutions of the differences regarding our constitutional name are being sought on the international level, but we also have to face the fact that a solution of the problem could hardly be found without mutual negotiations of the two involved parties. My position is going to be clear, consistent and directed toward the protection of the constitutional name and the identity of the Macedonian people. When it comes to the question of highest state and national interests, let me affirm that there is no chance of discussions or agreements with any foreign political subject without achieving prior consensus of all relevant political and civil subjects in the Republic of Macedonia.

UMD: *One of the beauties of Macedonia is its historical multicultural diversity. What will your message be to protect this?*

Pendarovski: We have to invest much more care in the protection and cultivation of the historical and natural values and beauties of our country. Macedonia is the only homeland we have. The multicultural diversity, the variety of ethnicities and religious peculiarities, are nothing but advantages with which Macedonia is adding to the quality of the global civilizational and cultural values and processes

UMD: *What would you convey to the Macedonian citizens if you were elected as president of the Republic of Macedonia?*

Pendarovski: The new President will have to do much more than what the present chief of state has done during his mandate. The new President will be President of all citizens of Macedonia.





Pendarovski: I shall use all the influence at my disposal for the purpose of creating auspicious political climate that will guarantee better life for all. We shall raise our country on its feet again. We shall bring it back on the road of democracy. I shall do everything in my power to elevate the freedoms and human rights on the level of the highest standards. We have to create free media space, independent judiciary, which will fight corruption efficiently and non-selectively. All good ideas in education, culture, sports and environment protection will receive my unreserved support.

UMD: Where do you see the role of the Diaspora and what is your message to them?

Pendarovski: Our citizens living away from their homeland are an inseparable part of the national tissue and of the state as a whole. Their experiences may prove invaluable for the positive changes in the country and for the fastest possible step forward on the path of progress. I shall be expecting with great enthusiasm every meeting with our compatriots living abroad, because I am aware that they will offer fresh ideas for my future activities. When we manage to unite our people and our efforts, the challenges we are facing will become much easier to surmount, while all citizens of Macedonia will enjoy the fruits and the results of this unification.

Presidential Candidate Interview with

Dr. Zoran Popovski

UMD: What are your domestic goals and priorities for Macedonia and its citizens?

Popovski: I want to put the citizen and its individual rights in the center of politics and not to affiliate the state to any political party. Furthermore, I see Macedonia as ethnic stable state that respects the collective rights of the communities in accordance with international norms. My dream is the citizens of different nationalities in Macedonia to live with each other, not side by side to each other. Without such stability, there is not an economic prosperity of the country. My goal for Macedonia is to join NATO and the EU and to ensure internal stability and territorial integrity, and thus economic growth. I would

immediately decontaminate the media and judiciary from daily politics, and if there are political prisoners there will be abolitions as well. We must turn Macedonia into a country where young people will return, and not leave. Without it, unfortunately this country slowly but surely will begin to disappear.

UMD: How ready are you for constructive cohabitation with the executive government, whoever it is?

Popovski: Cohabitation is inevitable with any executive government, but not the most important. The President should be a pillar of the political dialogue, a promoter of public debates and citizen's megaphone for things that have no constitutional accountabilities. Through it, the citizens need to restore trust in state institutions and have, conditionally said, their advocate for possible threats to their rights by the executive and the judiciary authorities. Otherwise, citizens will be a toy in the political life of the country, and unfortunately we have had such examples.

Dr. Zoran Popovski

▼ **Presidential Candidate**





UMD: Due to the growing rate of unemployment, many young people are leaving the country, especially those who have university education. What is your strategy for keeping these people in the country and reducing the "brain drain" from Macedonia?

Popovski: Macedonia is a country which is seriously affected by the so-called "White plague" and its population is constantly shrinking and aging. In the long run this is bad for the future of our nation. Macedonia as a country is investing in the education of young people and when the country needs to start picking the fruits from their youth and employability, they leave the country searching for livelihood abroad. As President there is much that can be done to stop this disastrous trend. Less money in the budget, and more money for the citizens and enterprises, is a model that can work. It means to give the opportunity to young people throughout soft loans and partial grants to start their own business. Furthermore, GROM is also a promoter of the idea of moving away the resources from Skopje. So much public money was spent in Skopje, that other parts of the country were completely neglect. This practice needs to stop immediately. And finally, Macedonia should develop through its scientific staff and its own new technologies to build its own industrial strategy whose holders would be the young people. In contrast, further public spending in unproductive investments such as monuments, baroque facades and a like, especially in Skopje will be a reason more for the young people to leave the country.

UMD: Macedonia needs investments to bolster its economic situation. What measures would you suggest to improve the economic status of the country?

Popovski: Practice shows that NATO member states have 4 times more investment than the countries that are not members, and Macedonia by waiting for its negotiations for EU accession loses each year 74 million euro grants based on the number of residents of EU Cohesion Funds. So the first condition for economic progress is EU and NATO accession. Furthermore, we must create separate distribution centers for placing the Macedonian products abroad. Furthermore, foreign direct investments in

Macedonia would be an opportunity for employment and keeping the young people in the country. It should be kept in mind that in these foreign companies decent incomes should be provided unlike the past years when wages in these companies were not incentive enough for young people and they again were looking for a chance to leave the country.

UMD: One of the main priorities of Macedonia are the Euro- Atlantic integrations in EU and NATO. Although for several years, Macedonia has received positive comments about the implemented reforms in the country, it continues to wait outside the doors of EU and NATO. Where do you see your role in advocating the accession of Macedonian in EU and NATO?

Popovski: Unfortunately, the Euro-Atlantic aspirations became only a declaration that began to bore people. For a long time there is stagnation in this area without any serious attempts to make some kind of breakthrough. Clearly, the key problem is the name dispute, but in the meantime we started receiving notes for the politicization of the judiciary, freedom of the media, the absence of political dialogue, etc. However, there is no alternative that EU and NATO should be our imperatives. How to achieve this? Significantly with a professional diplomacy, without provocation in relations with neighbors are turning to the present and the future. With our neighbors we need to start creating constructive relationships on a cultural, sports and media plan. Then the problems with the name dispute will become absurd. In the EU there are countries which are our traditional friends who we did not use to help us in joining European Union. That something we ought to do. Regarding NATO, I've already responded, unlike the authorities, that in regard of Ukraine's situation and the danger of expanding the conflict, we urgently need to be admitted to the alliance based on the application in 2008. Now is the time to push for it, because we have a serious situation in the region.

UMD: Greece's problem with Macedonia's name is another challenge that the country faces. What is your position regarding the dispute with Greece over the name "Macedonia" and where you see a possible solution?





Popovski: My position in relation to the country's name and identity of the Macedonian people is clear. We should not fool around with these things, or placing them on a referendum. Neither are we have received them on a referendum, nor we can change them on a referendum. If, as I said, we isolate the problem with the name, we need to have excellent relations with Greece. The strategy of some of their leaders, to postpone the problem solving until Macedonian disappearance, will not be successful. Macedonian people persisted for centuries, and it will stay like this. We were recognized by 135 countries including three members of the Security Council (China, Russia and the United States). Now we need to restore the confidence of the international community which we have lost as a result of the irrational spending of public money for memorials and playing history. Then we will talk about progress in this regard. I believe in beginnings with small steps. For example, for a month from now, in Skopje comes the Greek national team in handball playing barrage meeting with our national team. Let's do the twist in our behavior towards them and be great hosts. You will see that after a few such gestures things will start to change. We have to start from somewhere.

UMD: *One of the beauties of Macedonia is its historical multicultural diversity. What will your message be to protect this?*

Popovski: Macedonia is the cradle of history and the pearl of world cultural heritage, but unfortunately not yet sufficiently explored and presented in the international arena. Therefore we need to invest more in these researches, we need to integrate its findings into the educational programs, so our children can learn them and then promote them. Furthermore, they need to receive appropriate tourist promotion, which means we will need to make a separate strategy. The new monuments will not attract such attention, as our indigenous historical and cultural heritage. Lately, what started to worry me is the indolence of the authorities towards Ohrid as UNESCO town. If we lose that status, it would be devastating to our tourist brand.

UMD: *What would you convey to the Macedonian citizens if you were elected as president of the Republic of Macedonia?*

Popovski: People should see a President for all citizens of Macedonia, regardless of their origin, and their place of living. I'll do anything to make Macedonia a civil democratic state, to be internally stable with sovereignty over its territory, to develop economically, with no politics in judiciary, to have free media and to be fully integrated into EU and NATO. On this way, Macedonia will become an attractive place for living for the young people.

UMD: *Where do you see the role of the Diaspora and what is your message to them?*

Popovski: Five years I lived outside of Macedonia during the professional development and working at other universities where I occasionally had the opportunity to meet some of our immigrants. I was part of the Macedonian Diaspora in Columbus, Ohio, in Lund, Sweden and Viterbo in Italy. Most of these people had left Macedonia for economic reasons and that is understandable. Their remittances are vital for the Macedonian society, but is it enough? Of course not. We need finally to start seeing them as investment partners, not just senders of money. If the state becomes a service to our expatriates and then they will be motivated to help the country to recover. I think that on this area a lot can be done by providing better conditions for investment in Macedonia, by studying the Macedonian language and its tradition, by establishing of an Emigration Fund that will be managed by the Diaspora, by providing service information, etc. My impression is that the Immigration Agency and other state agencies in charge of the interests of the Diaspora are not fulfilling its missions in full. They must do much more for our expatriates, so they can feel that their country does not forget them and does everything so they can return one day in the country.



The Macedonians: Their Past and Present

by Ernest N. Damianopoulos

Book review by Stojan Nikolov, UMD Chairman

In this review, my aim is to introduce the author and his work to the Macedonian UMD membership. The book has ten chapters, each designed to be read independently, each being complete and standing on its own.

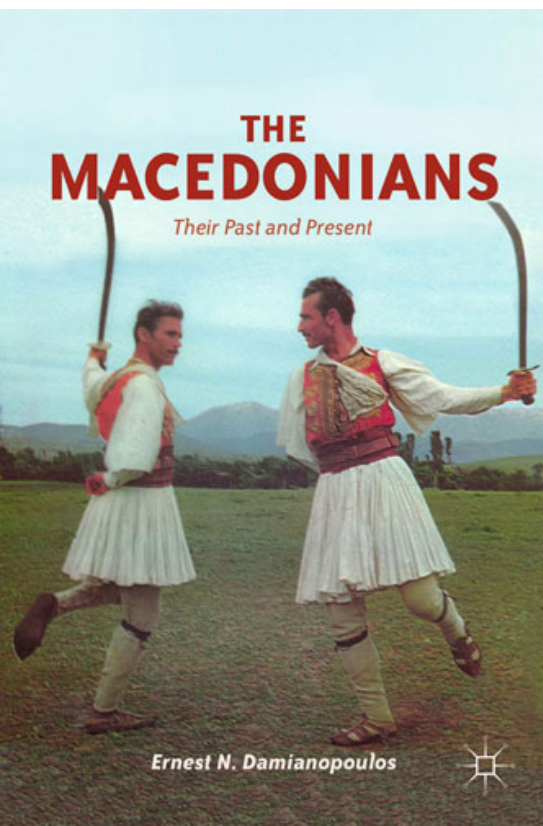
Chapters 1 and 2 are written in a novel/fiction style of writing for easy reading on the part of a non-professional audience. Chapter 1, provides a summary/overview of past Macedonian history; and, importantly, cites the initial

attempts to understand who the Macedonians are as they were seen in the early part of the 19th century. The ambiguity and uncertainty about the Macedonians begins here and continues to plague us to the present day.

Chapter 1, then, follows-up with the roller-coaster in-out phases of the subsequent Macedonian history including all the intrigue and machinations of the Balkan and European Great Powers opportunistically seeing Macedonia only as a region to be kept within the Ottoman Empire, grabbed or awarded to our Balkan neighbors; *but, never as a nation waiting to emerge.*

Chapter 2 digs into the main issue the author focuses on; namely, "Who Are the Macedonians?" The question is easy to ask; but, cannot be answered simply by asking - as anthropologists have done including Loring Danforth and Anastasia Karakasidou. There are so many overlaying layers of influence, cultural and otherwise, in the millennia since the ancient Kingdom of Macedon so that there are no easy answers. Any answer given is automatically suspect of being invalid due to outside influence through cultural/political indoctrination. The author then looks for valid methods to unravel the complexities and complications in finding an answer as well as the answer itself.

Chapter 3, takes on the problematic issue raised in chapter 2 regarding valid search methods towards providing valid answers to questions regarding the nature of the Macedonian ethnic identity.



The Macedonians: Their Past and Present
By Ernest N. Damianopoulos





Chapter 3 circumscribes sources of evidence applicable to any and all inferences of an ethnic identity. The questions raised and answered are: what counts as evidence for an ethnic identity that can be validly ascribed to a socio/political group? Where does it come from? From what academic disciplines? There are no easy answers to these questions because ethnic identity is a core (basic) concept across many disciplines: history, anthropology, sociology, political science, etc. Each discipline has its own methods and answers, often resulting in inconsistent ethnic identity definitions. Following a complex epistemological/ logical analysis, the author concludes that there are three basic sources of evidence: (i) historical domain; (ii) anthropological and/or political science survey questionnaires asking an individual member to identify his ethnic identity and give a cognitive rationale for his answer; and, finally, (iii) the sociological domain through identification of the socio-cultural characteristics of a targeted group including language, religion, styles of dress, dances/music, traditions in the home, formulaic systems for first and last names, etc.

While each source is necessary, it is not sufficient by itself. The evidence from all three combined is both necessary and sufficient in ascribing an ethnic identity to a targeted group. A potentially new source of evidence for an ethnic identity is cited in the form of DNA analyses (and perhaps also a gold standard); but this is only a future possibility because there is not much interest among academic geneticists in applying the well-established DNA genotyping methodology to ethnic identity per se and commercial ancestry identification organizations present findings that have not been subjected to peer-reviews in well-established genetic journals; and, therefore cannot be accepted at face value.

Having defined the basic sources of evidence pertinent to answering the question, "who the Macedonians are," subsequent chapters in the book, each by itself, is devoted to a presentation of evidence from each source domain. Chapters 8 and 9 bring the reader to the highpoint of the entire book in that the evidence presented earlier in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 is integrated, distilled and reduced as confirming/disconfirming evidence for the initial

research hypothesis as to "who the Macedonians are" presented in Chapter 2. The Macedonians are: "... a single, unitary, non-exclusionary, non-Greek, non-Slav Macedonian identity across dialect and region linked to the ancient Macedonians by sparse but critically important socio-cultural remains of the distant past. This hypothesis/theory of a modern unitary non-Slav, non-Greek Macedonian identity can integrate the disparate evidence from the different sources of evidence of chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 into a single unifying conception of a distinctive Macedonian identity and it recommends itself as being the preferred interpretation on the basis of the well-recognized scientific principle of simplicity.

In chapter 8, the historical, cognitive self-descriptive, and sociocultural evidence from chapters 4, 5, and 6 is recalled, reviewed, and distilled into usable evidence for the above Macedonian identity reformulation. This was done in terms of the historical anchor of the Macedonians being actors and players participating in the Modern Macedonian history, as well as by examining their own various self-identity designations as hyphenated Bulgarian-Macedonians, Slav-Macedonians, Greek-Macedonians, or, most importantly, as unhyphenated Macedonians, plain and simple. Only the sociocultural evidence from chapter 6 in this review of evidence is completely supportive of the unhyphenated Macedonian identity as presented in Chapter 2 (except for the Slav-oriented language). Unfortunately, all the other sources were found to be problematic and not easily seen as having support for the unitary Macedonian identity hypothesized in Chapter 2. Thus, the problem of reconciling and integrating independent/non-commensurate evidence both within and across domains had to be confronted and solved by an original methodology.

Toward resolution of this problem, two major epistemological and methodological issues had to be resolved first in order to successfully distill and integrate the evidence from all the different sources of the earlier chapters in relation to the question "Who the Macedonians Are:" First, how does one integrate evidence from independent and incommensurate source domains?





Second, even if successful, how can one arrive at a single, consistent, overall integrative narrative when in fact as well as the on the ground evidence shows that modern Macedonian history is a discontinuous roller-coaster sequence with in-out phases starting with the initial awakening revolutionary period including the post-Ilinden insurgency of 1903; followed by the unwanted post-partition interwar terrorist era (a reaction to and a response to the imposed partition of Macedonia); and, finally, by W. War II and the post-World II developments that, with the disintegration of Yugoslavia, led by default to independence. Each phase had different actors and players and the events were played out in different geographical settings. In the end, each phase dropped out; never to reappear.

The first problem was addressed according to the method described in postulate 10 of the last chapter. Outstanding questions that remained after applying postulate 10 and the consequent intensive analysis of all the evidence still called for new research and additional evidence as presented in chapter 9. Perhaps the author's most important contribution that merits high recommendation is:

The re-formulated Macedonian identity, defined as being unique, non-Slav and non-Greek, provides legitimacy to the claim of being Macedonians because it solves the dilemma posed by assuming we are Macedonians while defining ourselves ethnically as "Slav-Macedonians" tantamount to being Slavs.

UMD's Making Connections from Miami to Macedonia Reception A Success

By Mishko Josifov, UMD Miami Representative

On Friday, January 31, 2014, Miami's very own Bakehouse Art Complex was the venue for UMD's first, of what we hope many more, "Making Connections from Miami to Macedonia" Networking Reception. Hosted by the Honorary Consul General of the Republic of Macedonia for Southern Florida and UMD Advisory Council Member Dana Klein, NGO Art Studio Irena Gapkovska, UMD Advisory Council Member Nicholas Thaw, and UMD's Florida Regional Representative Mishko Josifov, the reception drew over sixty guests. The evening featured Macedonian hors d'oeuvres and Macedonian wines from Bovin. Macedonian wine expert Nino Milenkovski was on hand to provide details as to the wine flavors and origins. Photography provided by Humberto Ochoa and can be seen by visiting <http://www.umdiaspora.org>.

The special guest of the evening was His Excellency Dr. Zoran Jolevski, Ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia, and Consul Generals from more than twenty different nations, such as Germany, Thailand, Brazil, Panama, Jamaica, Bahamas, Barbados, Moldova, and Estonia attended.

Invest in Macedonia's South Florida representative Sasha Grujevski was also in attendance.

Decorated with Macedonian flags and cultural items to feel the spirit of Macedonia, guests were able to tour the Bakehouse Art Complex, with its exclusive art collection from seventy different artists, of which one is the Macedonian Irena Gapkovska and NGO Art Studio. NGO Art Studio is based in Skopje and in Miami.

During the formal part of the reception, Josifov welcomed the guests on behalf of UMD, and thanked Klein, Thaw, Gapkovska, and Bakehouse Art Complex's Marte Siebenhar and Amanda DeMello for making the evening's event a big success. Klein's efforts in representing Macedonia in South Florida were highlighted, as well as the great work by Thaw and Gapkovska in bringing Macedonian art culture to the area. Josifov expressed a big gratitude for the efforts of Ambassador Jolevski and his team for bridging stronger ties between Macedonia and the U.S. and increasing trade relations.



A raffle of Bovin's special Vranec wine concluded the formal program, and the lucky winner was the Consul General of Bahamas Mr. Ricardo Trico and his lovely wife Mrs. Trico.

The evening's entertainment was provided by one of Miami's finest DJ Pozitiv (Filip Dimovski), who played from Macedonian evergreen songs to modern popular artists, concluding the night with Macedonian circle dances, called the "oro." All the guests enjoyed dancing the night away, which made for a spectacular atmosphere and amusement.

UMD thanks Thaw and Gapkovska for their generosity in sponsoring the reception, and having delicious Macedonian wines from Bovin Winery to be enjoyed by all, which was arranged by Lena Gogovska from West Palm Beach's St. Dimitrija Macedonian Orthodox Church. UMD also thanks members Biljana Pendovska, Nikola Stojanovska, Nino Milenkovski, and Filip Dimovski for volunteering to make the event a success. Proceeds from the event will benefit UMD's charitable and educational programs.



The Bizarre, Delusional World of the Grkomani

By James Phillips

One summer, my family was invited to the wedding of a cousin. The groom, whose parents are Macedonian, was getting married to a woman of English descent. We were related to the groom's father; the groom's mother and her side of the family, however, were Grkomani. The wedding ceremony took place at the Greek Orthodox church. Later, during dinner at the reception, the traditional Macedonian "Pig Dance" was performed to a Greek song. This was a ludicrous contradiction, as the Pig Dance is strictly a Macedonian wedding custom. After dinner, when the "Bread Dance" was performed to kick off the night's entertainment, a Greek song was played again. More Greek songs followed. My family realized that the evening would be dominated by the Grkomani, so we decided to leave the reception early, and have not spoken to the groom's family ever since. In 2009, my dear Koum passed away. My Koum, a patriotic Macedonian to the core, has a nephew who is married to a Grkomanka.

During the entire funeral, and the luncheon that followed back at the Macedonian church, she would insist on speaking Greek to everyone, including my gentle, soft-spoken Kouma, who I have never heard utter a word of Greek in my life. Shamelessly, she even admonished my Koum's son for the funeral being conducted under Macedonian Orthodox rites and not Greek ones! I was thoroughly disgusted by her impudent and insensitive behavior, and considered it to be a form of abuse.

Such is the nuisance of the Grkomani. There is no Macedonian who has not had an unpleasant, upsetting experience with a Grkoman.

Who are the Grkomani? There are many characterizations of them, but essentially, Grkomani are Aegean Macedonians who call themselves or pretend to be Greek. What motivates the Grkomani to behave that way, what is their "inner reasoning", is indeed perplexing.

My lifelong observation, however, is that Grkomani are Macedonians with an inferiority complex who are enamored and spellbound by Hellenism. This inferiority complex stems mostly out of total ignorance.

It is very disconcerting to be in the presence of Grkomani, to be among Macedonians who identify as Greek. They are impervious to reason, and are not capable of introspection.

Grkomani are thoroughly self-deceived because they truly believe that they are accepted and recognized by Greeks as one of their own (or, as Macedonians say, as "nashi"). This delusion is utterly false. Greeks will indulge and play along with the Grkomani, and pretend friendship, but privately, the Greeks ridicule and laugh at them, calling them "Skopiani" and "Vulgari". Greeks, however, do not object to the Grkomani, because their existence diminishes the actual size, strength and presence of the Macedonian community. Greeks also know the offense and anger that Grkomani provoke.

Every ethnic group has a "sixth sense" and natural affinity for their own, so why would the Greeks be different? Greeks are not fooled. The Grkomani betray themselves as non-Greeks in several ways: they do not seem Greek, they do not speak Greek with an authentic accent, their overall knowledge of Greece is thin, and their place of birth or origin in present-day Greece, when disclosed to Greeks, all put them under a cloud of doubt and suspicion. In addition, all Grkomani retain some degree of Macedonian consciousness and self-awareness, so they never quite assimilate into the Greek world, hard as they try.

Ridiculed by the Greeks, and avoided by the patriotic Macedonians, the Grkomani inhabit a bizarre, delusional world of their own, and associate mostly with one another. They do not recognize the inherent contradiction of their behavior: if the Grkomani associate mostly with one another, and not with actual Greeks, then why don't they simply be Macedonian and be free??

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