

# The Symbolism of the Prespa Agreement (Prespa Pain)

*By Petre Nakovski*

*Translated from the Macedonian  
by Elizabeth Kolupacev Stewart*

Today is August 14, 2023. It's dawn. The sun's rays radiate across the gray morning from behind the top of the peak Golema Cuka, part of sublime Pelister. From the balcony I see the first rays that awaken the crows and the hills beyond the border. The sunlight slowly descends, illuminates the long ridge of Nivitsi and spreads across the blue glass of Lake Prespa. That's how it is now. That was not the case on 14 August 1949. On that day, planes flew from the mountain Bela Voda suddenly, like eagles, they showered Prespa with fire. It was burning and the sky bent low to take the smoke from the napalm bombs. Prespa was burning and along with her burned the people of Kostur, Lerin, and the fighters of the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG). The last day of the great and bloody battle of the Civil War flowed in fire and flame. On this day, so many years ago, Prespa was burning.

A lot has been said and written about that day and the days before it and after it, usually relating to current, future or more distant needs and goals. Rarely do we speak and write about the truth that way, in a way that makes sure it is not forgotten. However, amateur writers wrote tons of paper with unverified events. In them for the most part appears hatred, threats and calls for revenge. Hard words that can be borne easily by even the filthiest paper.

Seventy-five years ago, on August 15 (which, as I write, is tomorrow), the bells rang for the last time in Prespa. The great Christian holiday, The Great Mother of God, was celebrated. Today, bells ring only in Nivici. But once, the people of Nivitsi and the rest of the people of Prespa celebrated the great holiday together.

The Blessed Mother of God is the protector of Nivitsi and all Prespa. And also the protector and village saint of my village. On that day guests from Kosinec, Lobanica, D'mbeni, Smrdesh, V'mbel, Dolno Papratsko would come to my village. After the service in the church named after the Holy Mother of God, in their best clothes, everyone celebrated the great holiday with the sound of all the bells of the surrounding villages, and Douro's clarinet; he was from the village Openi.

And then?

Then the Civil War began and the bells were silenced and they remain silent. Today in my village there is no one to strike the bell, there is no one to light a candle to the Holy Mother of God, Christ the Savior, All Saints, to pray and worship, to light a candle for the souls of those who died in the mountains of Macedonia and those who will never return.

Today, from the morning, I have been sitting alone under the burden of this memory and am very sad...

From my balcony this morning I see the blue of the lake and the sky, the green of the forests spread over the surrounding hills and mountains in whose embrace lie the two Prespa Lakes, and I look back with pain to the last days of the Civil War. Seventy-five years ago, on the morning of August 10, 1949, before the sun rose well, fighter jets from the airfields in Ioannina, Kozani, Kostur, Florina and Thessaloniki smashed the trenches and bunkers of the promise and hope called "The enemy will not get through Vicho". The government army did get through, aided by tanks, battle wagons, hundreds

of cannons and mortars, and moved into attack. One defender for every 10 attackers. The most dangerous positions were defended by injured fighters, who never left the fire and ashes of the bunkers and trenches.

I did not experience these horrors, but spiritually and with all my consciousness I feel them and experience them as my own unhealed wounds and enduring pain.

Years have passed, but the memory, which is an integral part of our human, ethnic, Macedonian suffering, has not died out. My knowledge of those days was enhanced by the book "History of the Civil War", which was given to me ten years ago by a Lerin acquaintance of mine.

In it, using knowledge and painstaking effort, the author plunges you into a vortex of horror and disturbs your sleep. The horror follows you until dawn and your day will be an image of hell.

On page 533 of my copy the author writes that on the flat area of the Small Prespa Lake and all the way from the Preval Pass to R'bi and the Peroo tower, up to the village of Nivitsi, on August 13 and 14, 1949 the Greek Air Force dropped 34 bombs weighing 250 kg, 530 bombs weighing 125 kg, 1,900 bombs weighing 10 kg, 620 rockets, 26,000 shells, 43,000 machine gun bullets and 70 napalm bombs, at that time the most horrendous and effective weapon. They were dropped from American and English planes on poorly armed but exceptionally brave fighters of the Democratic Army of Greece, in whose ranks of the total number of 25,000, there were 14,000 Macedonians, boys and girls aged 16 to 25. A small group of them were volunteers, but most of them were mobilized by force. Some of their fellow fighters were Greeks, who, like the Macedonians, were village boys and girls. The hell on Gramos lasted only 70 days. An epic of endurance, heroism, courage, fighting spirit, faith and deceit. What were they defending against a government army numbering a hundred thousand, well-armed by the United States of America, and accompanied by American and English military advisers? They defended hills, mountains and cliffs and died on the peaks and behind boulders. A year after the bloody battle for Gramos and after the bloody and unsuccessful battles for Negush, Voden and Lerin, they were caught in ambushes in the hills and mountains of the region called Vicho, where by order of the Politburo of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) and the DAG headquarters, the slogan "The enemy will not get through Vicho" was promoted so that the civilian population, from all villages of the region Vicho and Prespa, regardless of age, was mobilized to dig trenches and build bunkers. Only at night. They were convinced that the enemy would not get through Vicho. They waited for the enemy and experienced them...

The iron bombs and napalm were first dropped on Gramos in a battle that lasted seventy days behind the wretched peak, hills and rocks over which, in addition to thousands of cannon fire and mortar shells, aircraft bombs and countless machine-gun and automatic bullets, the aircraft of the Royal Air Force fired barrels filled with incendiary mixture that burned people and the earth. As a result, from June 14 to August 20, 1948, Gramos burned, and the bloom of Macedonian and Greek youth died.

In the book, the author does not indicate how many shells and bullets were fired from the cannons, mortars, tanks, rifles, submachine guns and machine guns. That area stretches to no more than 10 square kilometres. Were there too many or too few bombs that fell in that small area and on the crippled units of the DAG and the large number of civilians who rushed to the Peroo-Tower in unprecedented panic to find salvation on the peninsula they called Africa? The author notes that 80 per cent of those who ran to this open space were killed. No, it wasn't a battleground. It was a slaughterhouse. Were the iron and lead fired too little or too much, were the dead whose bones lie in the mass graves in the area between Rabi and the Peroo-Tower Bridge, in the sands and reeds between the Big and Small Prespa Lakes, too many or too few? They were not Aegeans, they were Macedonians, and those who managed to stay alive were sentenced to a decisive exodus.

One of the most beautiful landscapes of Macedonia, on this day August 14, 1949, was aflame.

Before that, on March 25, 1949, in the village church in Nivitsi, the Second Congress of the People's Liberation Front (NOF) took place. There were 700 delegates, most of whom were DAG fighters. The general secretary of the CPG solemnly praised and insidiously deceived them:

*"In northern Greece, the Macedonian (Slavo - Macedonian) people have given all for the fight and are fighting with unbridled heroism and self-sacrifice, which is admirable. There should be no doubt that as a result of the victory of DAG and the people's revolution, the Macedonian people will be fully recognized and acquire a national revival, as they themselves want. In order to get it, today they are sacrificing their blood."*

All stand. Strong, long-lasting applause, shouts of victorious slogans, calls of gratitude for what was promised. And beside all this, a different voice sounded from the congressional rostrum.

Evgenia, an ordinary, illiterate woman and mother, forced to dig trenches and build bunkers, to transport the wounded and weapons, stood behind the rostrum and, with pain in her voice, spoke in her Kostur dialect:

*"Comrades and friends, dear and cherished commanders and fighters of DAG, great men of the party. I, Evgenia, salute you all, all who are here and all who are in position on the mountain, and all who are lying in hospitals waiting for your wounds to be treated and all who are wounded... I salute you, I, Evgenia, about whom it has been said carried most of the wounded and has carried timber and wood and stones, and dug trenches... They told me to speak, to speak for myself and on behalf of those like me, to speak here at the Congress, now. I said to them: but I am a simple peasant woman. What can I say in front of important people, to DAG's heroes... I know how to plow, to reap, to bake, to keep house... Right... I gave birth to children and breastfed them and they grew healthy and strong... beloved children, may it please God that they be alive and well, and also may yours be alive and well..."*

Evgenia stopped for a moment, looked at the church ceiling and thought that she saw Christ the Almighty with her eyes wide open and wanted to cross herself, to pray, but she remembered that Vera had said to her yesterday:

*"Whatever you do Lenda, don't accidentally cross yourself because you will offend all communists..."*

And instead of prayer, Evgenia swallowed the lump in her throat and continued:

*"They grew healthy and strong, tall up to here and then they joined the fighting, and the little ones... the little ones are in those countries ... what are they called... ah yes, countries that have people's democracy... It's true... I've been carrying wounded for two years, carrying timber, digging trenches, but not alone. There are many with me, all like me, worn out with sagging shoulders and with blisters on their arms and legs, sleepless and undernourished and thirsty and wounded and some others who have remained there in Bela Voda, on Mali-Madi, on Lunzer and on Bikovik and on the other battlegrounds, and many from outside Lerin and from Lerin itself... thanks to the Lord God and the Blessed Mother of God, I have been kept alive and well, and here I am in front of you, making a speech. What should I talk to you about? It is best that again I wish you to be healthy and well, and safe and sound, rather than make a speech. There are others for speeches. Others can speak better than they could carry timbers and the wounded, to dig while bombs fall and there is machine gun fire..."*

Vera is shifting anxiously and gives a hand signal to get to the main part. Evgenia noticed it and resumed:

*"I would prefer that you ask me questions or better that I ask you questions. But let me tell you this first. For two days, Vera, my friend who sits there in the first row, for two days, she tried to teach me, an illiterate woman, how to make a speech. She told me first and foremost to greet the greatest, the wisest and the most..."*

Here Evgenia forgot what was the third most... For a moment she stopped, thought, strained herself but could not remember what the third thing was that had evaporated from her head... What was it? Vera gave a sign, almost called out:

*"The son, the chosen..."*

*"Right, OK, I remember... and the greatest son, yes, son, the greatest son who leads us from fight to fight to fight..."* and Vera from the front counts on her fingers, *"both from victory to victory and may he be well and live to lead us from fight to fight and to..."*

*"Long live Comrade Zachariadis!"* A strong and penetrating voice, somewhere from the middle of the church interrupted Evgenia's speech.

*"Zachariadis, Zachariadis, Zachariadis!"* The church thundered, everyone stood on their feet, clapped for a long time and shouted the name of the greatest son.

It was the first time Evgenia had heard such loud shouting. She regrouped and when the shouts and clapping subsided, she continued:

*"May he be alive and well, and may the others be alive and well. I see him from here. He's sitting in the first row... and I will ask him directly. I want to ask comrade Zachariadis, to ask him many things that come to my mind when I am carrying the crippled boys and girls on a stretcher, or on a rug or overcoat. Some of them die. They beg me for water or food when they are thirsty and hungry, they beg for help when they cannot walk because their legs are frozen or wounded. That is when I say to myself: if one day I meet that famous, clever, brave Zachariadis, as they say the dear and beloved Zachariadis, so I can ask not only for me, but also for many mothers who are not here, who are at the borders and who are on the mountains, who are herding their livestock higher up the mountain, taking water and bread and bullets and bombs up higher and bringing down the wounded, and who have buried the dead, and who weep and tear out their hair when they are told their child has been killed, to ask him — Why, oh Zachariadis, do we, day and night, have to suffer great fear for our children, for our homes, for plentiful crops, for our livestock, for our closest and most beloved ones? Before us and behind us, Zachariadis, we see only blackness, only fear, only trembling tightens our hearts, only evil turns around us. Did I say something bad? And you, Vera, from there, from the front row, don't bare your teeth at me and stop gesturing with your hands. Why did you prepare me to give a speech... I swear on the golden cross... Let me tell you from the bottom of my heart... to pour out my pain, to lessen my burden, that is what the women told me to do... they told me, Evgenia, do not make a fool of yourself when you speak in front of everyone there at the Congress; just say the truth and ask... for all of us and from all of us... And I, here at the Congress, as the women told me — women who are mothers and widows... I want to speak from my heart about everything that has accumulated in my heart and in my soul, because I do not have the mind to speak like the great men do from the mind... my speech pours from my heart and my soul, and from pain and bitterness and heartbreak... did I say something wrong? If what I say is wrong in your opinion I will fall silent and sit down... did I say something wrong?..."*

Evgenia paused. The church was silenced. She is shocked, she seems to be caught in a fright...

*"What do I want, Zachariadis?"* The silence was cut by her voice as if with a knife, her voice seemed to thunder in the church. *"We raise our girls and boys to be husbands and wives, to be sons-in-law and brides, we teach them to take over from us when we are old, and you take them for us, you make them into soldiers, you teach them to die, may a plague take you!... Is that what God all-seeing wants? Is that right? Our crippled daughters lie in hospitals... some are legless, armless... how will they lead a bridal dance? And we planned for them to be brides... Brides, oh Zachariadis, brides... And now our sons and daughters have grown up too early on the mountains; and you, oh Zachariadis and you, the commanders who are here, are proud that our children are soldiers, as you say — fighters. While we die of fear... bad news every day... Fighters, you say, make them fighters, don't you, fighters who know how to die... Is that what God says? Is that right? Our crippled*

*daughters, Zachariads, how will they hold a child, a toddler? How will they give water to an old father or father-in-law, how will they go to the spring for water? How will they hold a pitcher, how will they knead bread, how will they weave... they use crutches. I have seen this in the hospitals of Elbasan and other hospitals..."*

Down below, in the front row, Vera is agitated. She puffs out her cheeks, widens her eyes, kneads her hands, cracks her fingers...

*"Enough," she whispers, "enough, bitch, shut up, shut up, may God strike you down, go mute ... why did I have to pick you to speak. Oh my God what you have done to me...shut up," she swears.*

But Evgenia stopped just for a moment. She untied her black scarf, spread her long braid that was prematurely gray across her shoulders. She wiped her forehead and cheeks, swallowed with difficulty and continued to ask in the same voice:

*"Zachariadi, why are you gathering our children, to wipe them out? They didn't even grow, and you collect them up... may evil collect you!"*

Vera jumped up and shouted breathlessly, *"Enough! Get off!..."*

*"No, no, Vero, my words are not enemy words... a few days ago Donovica saw her son who is barely fifteen years old... And you take the boys to Prespa to make them into soldiers... What did you say to us, Zaharidi? You told us to give everything to win. We listened and we gave everything. That's what you said. And our villages are empty and deserted. Spiders weave webs in them... why, Zachariadi? Didn't you say, give me all you have. And we all did. Didn't you say, do not let the enemy pass through Vicho. And we're doing everything to stop the enemy getting through. We have dug up whole hills and mountains, we dug deep into them. We dug trenches and made bunkers. That's what you told us to do, Zachariadi, and that's what we did. Bunker to bunker, ditch to ditch from here to there, trenches from which voices cannot be heard. Who will get our people out of there? Not the enemy - not even a sparrow can fly out of there. You said to do that, so we did that. And now blackness is all around us. Look around, Zachariadi, and see if you can see a single woman who is smiling, a woman who is joyful, a woman in white... No. All the women are dressed in black. Like wolves we feed our little ones by night in the moonlight, hidden in the forest and in the trenches. And then we carefully step carrying timbers and stones on our shoulder - above Lunzer, to Bela Voda, to Chuka, to Lisec and other hills... breastfeeding mothers' milk dries up from the exhaustion and fear, but they keep going... And, comrade Zachariadi, we are terrified. Fear that - whether today or tomorrow - we will be greeted by a new and terrible news. We only hear black news and every day there is more blackness falling down on us. Did I say something bad? Tell me, did I say something bad? I was told to give a speech. But I, I don't know how to give a speech. I speak from the soul, Zachariadi... And you now tell us that victory is close? Close, but for whom? Who will remove the blackness from us? You say victory is close, but while it comes, will there be anyone tomorrow who can give birth, who can light a fire?" Evgenia pressed together her palms, laced her fingers together, "Our fires have gone out, Zachariadi... What we were, we are no longer. What we wanted to be, we will not be..."*

Evgenia crossed her arms on the rostrum, rested her forehead on them and burst loudly into tears. There was silence in the church. It was as if the angels and the saints, silenced for ages, were astonished and with humility gazed at the woman before them...

*"What more can I say, Zachariadi... We have done everything asked of us and we want to know why such evil has befallen us? The blackness is too heavy for us and we are waiting for the victory that you promise and talk about every day, but that empty victory that is always so close takes more and more of our children and covers us with heavier blackness. Our villages are burning to the ground... Close, you say, the victory is close... But who is victory close to? To us? Even the foundations of the houses are gone, they have been flattened by the enemy... You say victory is close, but when it arrives, will there be anyone to rejoice, build, plow, sow, give birth, sing, huh? I am asking: Huh???? I'm asking... And I feel like crying... crying not only for me, but for all*

*the mothers, for all the widows, for all the wounded and crippled... To cry, because here, here" – she touched her chest – "I am hurt here... there is a tightness here... a choking... What else should I say? I want to tell the commanders to look after our children who are up in the mountain defending positions: you have many tributes from your mothers who beg you and ask you to promise: be careful, children... take care, darlings... May the Lord God and Our Blessed Lady, Mother of God, keep you... That's it for me..."<sup>1</sup>*

That huge deceit of the secretary-general of the CPG was not accepted even by his closest collaborators. While for the large number of Greeks and Macedonians in prison and in prison camps who accepted that crazy idea, party discipline rules dictated that they were to be shot for high treason without any court verdict.

Because of the faith that the Macedonian people had in that leader, the Macedonian people sacrificed their lives, sacrificed their loved ones, sacrificed their property. They sacrificed themselves. Unfortunately, the successors to that admired leader, to be rehabilitated after many years, would declare to the Greek public:

*"There is no Macedonian minority for our party in Greece. The same is repeated by others as a refrain."*

That open statement of support for self-determination for the Macedonian people was nothing more than a promise that in Greece Macedonians would gain their own autonomy. In the speeches given by the leaders of the NOF, that promise was unquestioningly accepted, praised and spread among the DAG fighters and the Macedonian peasantry, who stepped up mobilization into battle even more because of it, and with the persuasive slogans shouted by the activists and propagandists of the NOF, sacrificed their lives even more. "There should not be a single Macedonian man or woman who is without a rifle. All should go to battle for the victory of DAG and the people's revolution," became the favorite slogan of the NOF activists. During the last five months of DAG's destruction, fired by the spirit of that deception, the Macedonians already represented half of DAG's fighters. This "regaining" of autonomy, of something that did not even exist, but had yet to be established, meant nothing but the mobilization of much of the Macedonian population into battle, and the introduction of division, hatred, discord and quarrel between the Macedonians in Greece and the People's Republic of Macedonia. The creator of this division was not naive. He knew where this discord could lead. Beria's guide and one of Stalin's favoured ones, he followed the path that led to destruction. The Macedonian participants in the Civil War realized this too late. Much of the population of Kostur and Lerin was resettled by the communists into the forests near the Greek-Albanian border. They said doing this would leave the enemy with a deserted, scorched earth where it would not be able to feed itself. However, what in fact happened was that this evacuation was just what the enemy needed; it left the way open for food to be sent to it - food arrived in abundance on ships from America. It is not surprising that Argir Kovaci, major of DAG, in a letter addressed to Zachariadis among other things said:

*"Comrade Zachariadis, I am asking that we protect the remainder of the slavomacedonian people; the ones we did not uproot and send to emigration..."*

Time will reveal all of those who caused the war and contributed to the tragedy that the Macedonians lived through - helped by a careful review of the original documents.

For the duration of the Civil War, Prespa was its centre. On December 23, 1947 in the villa of the Russian White Guard, Colonel Gritsenko, in the village of Asamati on the other side of the border, the First Provisional Democratic Government was formed. Until June 28, 1948, when the Informbiro was proclaimed, it was the headquarters where the general secretary of the CPG met with his closest associates who were from among high-ranking figures of the then Communist Party of Macedonia.

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from the novel *The Big Con* [Golemata Izmama]

Here, in the light of the gas lamps (electricity was not introduced to Prespa until 1957) everyone feasted on delicious dishes made from Prespa carp and drank the best Macedonian wines. At dawn the jeeps would return to Vineni or to Nivitsi or to Orovo or to Grazdeno.

The villa of the Russian White Guard Colonel Gritsenko in Asamati still exists today. After the proclamation of the Informbiro, Zachariadis sided with Stalin. The road to Asamati was closed to him and so he found a place in a mountain cave above the village of Vineni. At that time a steep goat path led to the cave, and today concrete stairs lead to the hill from where there are views of a large plain covered with the shade of a low, dense oak forest. There were workshops for sewing uniforms and shirts, for repairing pots and boots, a dairy for processing sheep, goat and cow's milk, which the Prespani were obliged to give for the fight and victory. From the edge of the forest, a narrow path leads to the left and, at the end of it, there is a thick old oak. Next to that old oak there is a large stone behind which is the cave opening. On the oak trunk there is nailed a sign with the inscription "Zachariadis Cave". After the comfortable and warm rooms of Gritsenko's villa in Asamati, Zachariadis moved to the cave. There he rested, slept, and made party decisions; decisions that later turned out to be as dark as the cave. He rarely consulted anyone on these decisions - even his closest associates. Today, the bear cave has become a tourist attraction and a place of remembrance and respect. At the entrance to the cave, the children or grandchildren of like-minded people, devotees and admirers, have placed a large portrait of him carved on a marble slab. The portrait is wreathed, on the left and right, by two olive branches. A smile is concealed in the eyes and face of the leader where once a false promise was concealed. And now looking at his image placed in front of the entrance of that bear's den, it seems he is saying:

*"You are welcome; come and enter paradise..."*

A kilometre from the cave was the village of Orovnik. Was. A partisan base destroyed by bombings. It is now deserted. Only the old church, broken tiles and excavated foundations remain. It is a long-lasting sign that there were once people here who were uprooted by war and spread around the world. From there, a cobbled forest road leads to the village of Grazhden. Plains, fields, meadows and forests. During the Civil War the whole village was a partisan hospital. After intense bombardment, the hospital was moved to a big cave where there were wooden beds on three-levels set with hay and paper, where the wounds of fighters from the battlefields of Vicho and Mali-Madi were treated.

On the far shore of the Small Prespa Lake, just outside the border with Albania, was the village of Drenovo. Now, it is gone. It was a notorious communist camp. Those whose sons and daughters did not join the forced mobilization or who defected to the other side were imprisoned and tortured in that camp. They were tortured for days until they reached extreme exhaustion, they dug tunnels at the foot of the nearby mountains to store weapons. The use of hard labour was used as a punishment: it was supposed to re-educate them. Years ago, somewhere far away to the north millions through war came to freedom in gas chambers. The partisan general whom the senior leadership blamed for the failure of the battle to capture Voden was also shot here. He was called Geogragijadis, and paid for someone else's guilt with his life. Above are the villages of L'k, Orovnik, Popli, and further north there are Strkovo, Medovo, and to the north-east there is R'bi and above there is German. On the other side of the Small Prespa Lake there is Nivitsi. This circle of villages, together with houses, courtyards, cellars, cattle, meadows, gardens, mountains and caves in the whole time of the civil war, formed the large military-political base of the Democratic Army of Greece.

By the end of the war Prespa was the seat of the military and political leadership of the DAG and the CPG and the headquarters of the NOF. Weapons from Yugoslavia and other communist countries were carried to Prespa and, at night, were loaded on horses and mules and transported from Prespa to Gramos. The printing press that printed Macedonian newspapers was in Prespa. In Prespa the first courses for Macedonian teachers and the first Macedonian schools were offered. Prespa was a free territory and a thorn in the eye of Athens.

And now seventy years later, dozens of black Mercedes set off from the Prevsal Pass, follow the winding asphalt road, drive by the village R' bi and then go left. They are in no hurry. They cross the bridge and turn right, and go up; a short stop at the lookout – a place from where you can see the entire eastern shore of the Great Prespa Lake – and then on, above the village of Dolno Dupeni and our villa with the Sun from Kutlesh. I'm not sure they can see me, but I can see them from the balcony through my binoculars. I see a small special flag and the column of black Mercedes cars disappears behind a bend near the Church of St. George. I don't see them now, but I know they are already down there.

The road ends in Nivitsi.

They were not carrying bombs, but rather the text of an agreement called the Prespa Agreement. They drove along the same road where on August 13 and 14, 1949, hundreds of fighters of the Democratic Army of Greece and residents of Prespa and more distant villages died. They drove along the road where there was defeat and the exodus began. Inside the cars, there were smiling faces. Among them, the signatories, the prime ministers and those, who for years made promises, held discussions, applied pressure; those, the representatives of the Western world; representatives whether president, prime minister, or minister, who stained the red Macedonian carpets and, from the rostrum of the Assembly shamelessly lied. And the representatives of the people, as they called themselves, fattened their buttocks in parliamentary chairs, they believed all the shameless lies. None opened their mouths to ask or question. Their silence was their consent to every deceit.

Greek and Macedonian television broadcast it live. On the TV screen images of the surroundings, of the surrounding hills. On the TV screen a new image. On the rocky shore of the lake, a rocky shore which was once battle-bloody, above the lake – a solemnly decorated table, state flags, and they – the signatories and officials. Cameras hum, televisions broadcast. A short anticipation, the signatories, foreign ministers, sign something that will be considered by legal scholars and experts, an agreement written by others, but those who signed it had not even read it. In due course, legal opinion and time will show, and the damage of the signed agreement will be understood and assessed.

The signing was marked by thunderous applause, hugs, sloppy cheek kisses, cold handshakes. With a slow and confident step, the Italian woman, on whose face you can see an ugly mockery, approaches the signatories; behind her the Austrian, with hidden satisfaction on his frowning cheeks for who knows what reason; and to one side the old man, silently, who, as he claimed, for twenty years played and set this up for just one cent. Now the chefs of the bitter dish walk slowly, not as before. The question seems to be drawn on their faces: is there any other fool in the world who sells the name of the country as if it were pumpkin, pepper, cucumber, tomatoes on the Serbian vegetable markets? The most smiling and certainly the happiest is the prime minister of **our country**. Looking at the TV screen, I was reminded of another of his performances in 2010, when in front of the group of his supporters and admirers, waving his hands wide and with visible hatred on his face, he shouted loudly: "When we come to power we will sack everyone who does not think like us," and with even greater hatred on his face, he shouted even more loudly: "When we come to power, then we will eat people alive!" I look at him and think to myself: from whom did he learn those hand movements, from whom did he inherit that hatred so clearly visible on his face? He came to power and we saw what he did.

And after what he has done, he joyfully thinks about what to gift his Greek colleague. It occurred to him. He undoes his red tie and, with a wide smile, hands it to his "brother", as he called him many times. And he, the Greek colleague, awkwardly, steps backwards. The good friend or brother knows what a noose is.

And the color of the Prime Minister's tie reminds me of the blood shed and lives lost on Prespa soil; it reminds me of the forgotten Red Stars of the Vardar Macedonian partisans, who waved a red flag

during their attack. The partisans in Aegean Macedonia also wore a red star on their hats. On the partisan cap, above the Greek letter Delta, the symbol of DAG, on the partisan cap of Tina Andreeva, a young officer and hero of DAG, shone a Red Star. Everyone called her Cveta after the role of Cveta in the drama "Macedonian Blood Wedding".

Prolonged applause and shouts of joy and smiles of triumph flooded Nivitsi. That day, none of those present heard the painful groans of the wounded treated in the partisan cave hospital near Grazdeno; no one heard the terrible screams of those who died in the flames and fire of napalm bombs.

For years after that triumphant performance the two friends were left without the promised Nobel Prize and without a government seat. That is what the big men want, glorification, but only for one purpose. And the advisers who dirtied the red carpets no longer appeared in the government corridors and on the rostrum of Parliament.

For many years the question will be asked over and over – why was that agreement signed in remote Nivitsi?

Is it to remind us that there was a fine and other punishments for the use of the forbidden language, abuse with castor oil and horseradish, public beatings, secret eavesdropping, the ripping out of finger nails, putting hot boiled eggs under our armpits, tightening a hoop around the head or placing a live cat under the shirt, beating on the soles of the feet, hot pepper, shaving a cross in people's hair, the prisons and prisoner camps on remote islands, and to let us know that right here, in Prespa, we stomped on you!?

Did they who enthusiastically signed the Prespa Agreement, on this side of the border, know the above historical facts?

It is known that state agreements are signed in solemnly decorated halls, and not in an almost deserted hilly lakeside village which about seventy years ago was covered with Macedonian and Greek blood, shed in the name of freedom. Was it only because of the beauty of Prespa and because of the beautifully made up Nivitsi, once one of the poorest Prespa villages, that they decided to sign the agreement right there. Or was it a reminder by the Athenians that right here in Prespa, they wiped out many of our compatriots, and those who managed to save themselves from the napalm bombs were driven beyond the border without any right of return, and with this agreement you are giving up on our dead and our banished living?

In the years after the end of the Civil War, the authorities ordered the collection of mines, bullets, barrels, pieces of aircraft bombs, cannon and mortar shells, the levelling of trenches and bunkers to the ground, that there be a search under every bush and raking of the earth so that what was collected could be transported away so that no mark of the evil that happened here would remain. In the heart of the encircling green mountain range, Prespa sat silent for a long time without its people, numb with powerlessness, with rage and with pain. Silence. Silence occasionally torn apart by the cry of lake birds. That is until the authorities settled onto this quiet country migrant Vlach shepherds from Epirus and cattle farmer refugees from Albania. Prespa survived but without any Prespani, her people. In the Prespa houses other customs were followed and new languages that had not been spoken before took over.

Once the poorest village in Prespa where people made a living by hunting and selling cironki fish, Nivitsi is now a famous tourist village. It is gentrified and rich.

Hundreds of tourists from all over Greece spend piles of money there. They are attracted by nature and the rich food offerings of delicious Macedonian dishes and Macedonian wines. And when the Macedonian name is pronounced, some of them and some of us are disgusted, and others of them

and others of us are glad and proud. The Greeks named the village with the name Psarades (Fishermen), and our country was named Northern. Both names are ugly.

Years ago, I collected materials for my book "On the road with time". Searching along the shore of a small lake, in the reeds growing into the water, I saw a cradle.

I wondered which baby left this cradle, was without a mother, and which mother lost her baby from this cradle?

The lake waves quietly, gently rocked the cradle and the reeds sang lullabies over it. Of the many songs sung, which song is more cheerful and which is sadder and more painful?

I look at the empty cradle and pain compresses my chest. Whose cradle is that? I did not lift it into my arms. I left it to the waves to rock her and the reeds to rustle their lullaby... "Hey, Rock-a-bye, Rock-a-bye..."

There, in our homes, many cradles were left empty and many mothers without births.

Oh, Sway, Sway, Sway, our wretched fate...

The signatories, in order to save their dirty faces, said that they signed "in the name of the people".

Did they also forget "in the name of the people" the terrible suffering and screaming of the killing and wounding, those burning with napalm, which I can still hear? I still see their escape in the woods and forests where they sought help. But who could help them?

Centuries ago thousands of the blinded arrived in Prespa. After years, foreigners migrated to Prespa and in its worst time Prespa was emptied of Prespani, the people of Prespa.

After some years, one of the signatories will publicly and loudly proclaim "It is wrong! People, it is wrong! A shame!"

The man made his declaration and then took on forming a party to save what he had destroyed.

Did he ask himself who should be ashamed?

It is him. He should be ashamed. He put his signature on the agreement. Whether from a biting conscience or for some other reason, it is the signatory who will declare loudly: "It's wrong, people! A shame!"

For whom, you little fool, is it a shame?

For the people who defended the name in a referendum or for those who sold it out?

What other peoples in history have renounced a group of their own and their language by signing such an agreement?

The others wanted it, they extorted it from us and got what they wanted, and "our side," – let us call them that – without any consideration and not mature or capable enough to run a state, first gave up the name and the flag, then divided the country into fiefdoms, handed out citizenship to thousands, and led the state to its brink. It is they, in diapers, who took power before they were mature enough or capable enough to hold power.

And not only that, but much more besides. And that reminds me of lyrics of Prlich's song "1762 summer":

*“... I will choke you, I will shave you until I draw blood  
I will sow among the people  
Discord and disagreement,  
Between son and his father, and between brothers  
Hey! And between brothers.”*

I have the impression that these prophetic words were written today. What is happening and being done to us today does not appear to be anything but only black, because foreigners are deciding our future and shaping it, and it is black.

May Venko Andonovski be blessed for reminding us of Gane:

*“Ah, if only Gane were alive, to tell you who you are, from A to Z (so accuse his poetry of hate speech): thieves, idiots, fools, pains-in-the-arse, the shameless, the dishonorable, squanderers, vampires, reptiles, scoundrels, the vile, robbers, bum offerers, cynics, blockheads, violators, thick skinned, cheaters, eunuchs, cheapskates, couriers, jugglers, scum, scavengers, whitewashers, rascals, freaks, the mixed up, the sloppy, first-grabbers, janissaries, the mediocre, crawlers, robbers, the unsatisfied, enforcers, good-for-nothings, maniacs, prostitutes, dehumanized, arsonists, simpletons, flatterers (farts with pretensions of thunder), destroyed houses, lunatics, undisciplined, spectators, know-it-alls, peddlers, jerks, mother bashers and father bashers, profit-takers, wretches and easy-money makers, conjurers, stupid, suited cowerers, Facebook phanariotes, hooligans, stalkers, blasphemers, censors, oafs, irresponsible scumbags, charlatans, numbskulls!”*

These are all our words and people but there are some evil newcomers in the mix. But not included are the fighters and the partisans.

So, they are all our people and some other peoples or tribes, and some from the friendly West; and in order to be friendlier to us someone relocated the sunrise. All according to the patchwork Constitution and the highly anticipated and directed amendments.

The moment I write this, I pray strongly and loudly:

*“Our father, who art in heaven, come down from heaven to the land called Macedonia, forgive us our sins, teach us and show the way home to those that bring us evil...”*

*“Amen!”*

I pray and I just dream and in the dream I say to myself:

*“Come on, come on, wake up, be reborn partisan Macedonia!”*

For all those listed above without a first and last name, but who are known, some say that there is no cure. Others, on the other hand, oppose and persistently claim that there is a medicine for them in the “pharmacies” of Shutka and Idrizovo prisons. We can only hope that they will get there, after the thunder of the third Ilinden, which is advocated by academician Ljupco Kocarev in many speeches, articles and columns. God grant that his thought, word, hand, pen and paper be gilded, and that his wishes and dreams be fulfilled. And mine!

Recalling the Prespa Agreement and its consequences that are already flowing, tragically, the warning words of ingenious Prlichev bring tears to my eyes:

What did we do?

For every people, patriotism is a fundamental notion in which history is embedded. If you do not know the history of your own people, then do not seek or strive to be its president, prime minister or minister, and do not sign damaging agreements. And you who have already reached those positions,

and you, who want to come, gather your thoughts and do not forget that someone did not throw his boots in a well, but hung them on the ceiling, and for a joke that right now is his time for more requests. That threat or warning passed as if it were a joke, incompetents playing ball in state rooms, as if it was a joke and that by entering the defensive-aggressive Alliance, for Macedonia the Sun will rise in the West, that it is a joke waving the flag of a future great state. The new astronomer, who replaced the scalpel he was studying for with chalk and on a school blackboard convinces what is good for "North," made Copernicus roll over in his grave after centuries. And more. Do not close your eyes when someone under your nose denies your people and your language and do not seek brotherhood with those who once wore Nazi insignia on their chests and burned Macedonian villages.

And the deputy minister should learn that no part of the scattered Macedonian people is a minority – without shame she asked to include it as a minority in the preamble of the Constitution. Is that what she learned at home, in the classroom, or did someone from outside tell her?

And again, I will say, patriotism is not only a fundamental notion, but the knowledge that they, by some called Aegeans, are not a minority in the country in which with their knowledge, diligence and honesty, with a highly developed national feeling, adhering to the long tradition that springs from Kiril and Methodius, Goce Delchev, Zagorica Blagoev, Misirkov, Vlahov and a whole host of brave and wise persons regardless of where they lived or where they were educated, held in high regard the essence of being Macedonian, and who were invested in the creation of the Macedonian state.

Undoubtedly, the Prespa Agreement has historical significance. Time will confirm who will benefit the most: whether the small ones in the Balkans or the large ones beyond the ocean and the European descendants of the former colonists.

Today a huge cry rises in the West if the burial place of a small number of killed people is found. Today, no one was able to discover and open the mass graves in Prespa, in the area of Vicho and in Florina. Today Prespa is a forgotten mass grave. There are few living Prespani in Prespa today. There are few living Prespani who travel to Prespa. There are many graves and burial sites in Prespa, not of Aegeans, but of Macedonians.

When you look from the hill called Preval Pass, you will see the whole of the Small and the Large Prespa Lake and its surroundings, and the memory of great evil. Maybe then you will bow your head and venerate the Prespa Macedonian agonies...

That is all from me, because other, much stronger pens have described all her beauty, suffering, pain, despair, horror, dreams and hopes. I just set out to recall a few events from the past and present time in which the fate of Prespa was woven, mostly beyond the border line, and now the whole of Macedonia.

It is painful when you remember that in that divine beauty, now abandoned and pitiful, are piled all the pains of Macedonians from ancient and present times.

The years of betrayal are not counted. The same applies to the traitors. Behind them remains the damage and the demands and satisfaction of foreigners. There is no forgetting about them.

They will be remembered for a long time, like the kiss of Judas.

Don't forget!

My wife and I sit on the balcony of our villa and do not look away from the view of the southern part of the lake.

There the mountain called Vrba grows green. As the crow flies the border of Macedonia with Macedonia is about two kilometers away and from there very close and very, very far beyond it are our villages, our broken houses, our foundations under the rubble covered by weeds, thorns, our churches, our cemeteries in which our ancestors rest, hills, fountains and springs, our roots. We are there in our thoughts, our spirit, our memory and the sadness that pains us...

Although physically far away, we will always be close by in spirit and thought as long as we are alive.

We are called by the land of our birth, we are called by our memories ...

Then?

Then just one message:

You who come after us, do not forget the hearth of your ancestors...

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