

A Century of Silence
(1913 – 2013)



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edited by Risto Stefov)

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Chapter one – Returning to my roots

“Born in me is the need to tell: why I love the world, why I admire it, why I am grateful...” (Nikiforos Vretakos)

The beauty and the human spirit, with which Nikiforos created his works are for higher justice and a world for all the people.

Returning to my roots and facing the person whose seed had been destroyed.

1. One morning I walked into the courtyard of the old “Kosturki merak” café, such named by Husni Hussein - Pasha, a great friend of Ali - Pasha from Ianina. This is where the Kostur nobles and property owners got together for their morning coffee.

I sat under the weeping willow and on the opposite side of me, in the corner, sat an old man dressed in a traditional walnut coloured Kostur folk dress, which attracted my attention. But what I especially liked was that he adhered to our great tradition and wore a silver chain tied to a pocket watch resting in a tiny pocket in his vest.

The old man couldn't have been more than seventy years old, but his white hair, beard and moustache made him look older. He was a tall, bony man with a rosy face, hollow cheeks and a big forehead with locks of white hair covering both sides of his head. Under them rested his white eyebrows and below them his two peaceful and gentle blue eyes.

He was playing a weird looking miniature clay instrument. I later found out from him what instrument this was and what it was called. He said the instrument was called “Okarina” and that he had excavated it many years ago in the ruins of his grandfather's house. The instrument was many centuries old. Used even before Christ...

The melody was particularly attractive when he played the songs “Leno mori ...”, “Zaidi - zaidi, iasno sontse...” But I was even more impressed when he played “Kalesh bre Angio”, “Aide slushai, slushai, kletto bre Turche...”, Anama ne biduvam...”, but the best

song of all was “Tsrna se chuma zadala, tam dolu Kostursko...” The instrument squealed like the cry of a beaten down mother crying for her lost child... The songs were tearing my heart out and bringing tears to my eyes.

All the customers in the café were frozen in their seats and listened intently in silence. More people started coming in!

When the first tear dripped down my cheek, I said to myself: “This music comes from the depths of a flaming Macedonian heart...”

As I watched him play we exchanged glances a few times. I was anxious to find out: “Who was this man? What was his name?” Maybe he belonged to the old Ilinden revolutionary guard?

I always get excited when I hear about someone who was a revolutionary; who fought for Macedonia. Then I know that this man or woman has a big heart and that he or she sincerely loves their native Kostur and Macedonia and strives to drive out the plague (the occupiers; the Ottoman Empire until 1912 and Greece after that).

The old Ilinden revolutionaries used to say: “Do something worthy of being happy...” This was a message for the young.

The old man looked at me with sincere concern on his face and stepped towards me. When I looked at his face from closeup, I started to mumble to myself. His face was rigid and I could read the pain that his torturers had carved in the wrinkles of his cheeks. How many years had this man served in the dry Greek island prisons for being who he is?

I could see that I had something in common with this man. As much as I was sad, I felt joy in his presence. I used to think that I was the only one who had had such experiences.

A moment before the old man hugged me, he reached out his hand, looked at me with a sad look in his eyes and said: “Are you one of ours (Macedonian); one of those people... from General Markos’s last cleanse, when Markos’s men collected you by force? What was

it you called them during the (Greek) Civil War... ‘bright faced colonists from Pont (Asia Minor)’ and later they chased you out and sent you up north?”

I first asked him to “please sit” and pointed at the chair next to me. I then, in reply to his questions, said:

“Yes! I am one of them! You know, no matter how poor you are, it is not easy to leave your home... memories of home are painful, but after so many years I came back to my roots and want to collect the bones of my father and my brother. They were revolutionaries but at that time I was only 13 years old. And yes, in 1947 I was taken by force by Marko’s partisans and was made to fight for communism. But to this day I don’t know if anyone survived the experience. After the war I roamed the world... Your music... you know... reached my soul. I especially love those old songs you played. These were songs that my grandmother Dora and my mother Vana sang for me, the two special women in my life who gave us life and kept our family going. For me, when I found myself among thousands of our people, far away from Kostur, my birthplace, these memories were my spiritual sustenance. It has been more than half a century that I have been looking for my fate but there is no child, no sound, no laughter and no joy. Everyone has been exiled, everything has been uprooted and our footprints remain as scars on the world. The people of Kostur have forgotten how to laugh from the heart.”

He looked at me but his glance passed right through me. He must have remembered something, I thought. I sat down at my table. That which did not kill a person, made him stronger, I thought to myself. I then asked: “And who are you?”

There was a ringing sound in his voice and he spoke well. He had a smile on his face which changed depending on what he was saying.

He said: “It is good that you came. Otherwise, how would you get to know yourself? Who you were? Who we are? Half a century of living abroad has eroded your consciousness, something from which you cannot recover on your own. But here in your native Kostur it will be your duty to discover yourself and, as a son of this country, to find out how much you’re valued. Here you will find out why you

left your father's home and why our ancestors sacrificed so much for this country! My grandfather used to say: "Insanity takes only a moment in life, but regret is a lifetime!"

Calmly and soberly he recounted his unfinished story of his life in Kostur and the wider region and then said: "So, you ask me who I am?"

He then began to talk again while I listened: "Mine is a strange story," he said, "It is so strange it is difficult for people to understand; for those who have not been in this kind of prison camp, of course. A person who is not familiar with the depths of this underworld cannot possibly understand the realm of hatred. This kind of camp exists at the bottom of life. The underworld is the bottom of the largest bottoms. The camp where we were at, where they kept the Kostur revolutionaries fell beyond the realm of human existence. Every revolutionary in that camp had something lasting, something significant that helped him stay alive; something that helped him survive. He had to hang on stubbornly: in the summer under the infernal sun, in the winter under the ice while enduring daily hunger and endless humiliations inflicted on him by the soulless people who ran the camps.

It was dangerous to be in the right, where the powerful were in the wrong. We, the revolutionaries, experienced that in those barren islands where no humans existed..."

It was a strange look with which this old rebel stared at me. It was a look full of immense sadness and anger, and at the same time full of historical truth, wisdom and an endless desire to tell me all about our suffering. He said:

"I am one of the missing Kostur revolutionaries from the Ilinden era and, as you can see, I am alive but cursed. I am a person without youth and without family. I am a man whose masculinity was destroyed. I am no longer a man. Castration was my penalty on the dry island "Anafi" and then they said I was free to go! 'Leave and go to your beloved Kostur,' they said, 'but remember your seed will never sprout a rebel tribe'..."

I have no relatives and no love. Death? Let them teach me to forget death along with my love for Macedonia, for which I fought. Now nobody calls me Krsto, which is my real name, the name my mother and father gave me, by which I was baptized and by which everyone in my family called me. Now they call me “Stavros”, by my slave name, a name which was imposed on me by a law published in an ‘Official Newspaper’, law E. K. number 332, enacted on November 21, 1926.”

The old man mumbled something and silently disappeared into deep thought... It seemed like his thoughts were drying up. He mumbled again... something about my tears tearing at his heart...

“May God protect us,” I said, “from such beastly acts! How could they even be possible? How could one human being do that to another? Where did all this madness come from in these people? They must really have been enraged, mad, in order to do that and be able to live with it? I know this happened back in 1904 at the same time all the appalling village massacres took place, especially in Zagoricheni and Zelenich.”

A moment later Krsto looked compassionately at me and said: “This instrument produces original Macedonian melodies from which spring sadness, tears, melancholy, joy, happiness... that is why I made it my duty to play it and I have played it for years. It soothes my solitude and loneliness because I am a man who has lost everything and feels colder than winter.”

Suddenly the old man perked up, shook with delight and began to talk again, this time about his more recent past when he was a partisan in violent Kostur. He mentioned his grandmother Vana and how lonely and sad she was and how she cried all the time... He mentioned the long columns of ELAS fighters and the captured fighters. “The column was endless marching on its way south, to its destruction,” he said, “they were leading us to the deserted islands while our ancestral homes, the homes of our grandfathers, were set on fire.

He hesitated for a moment and then said:

“We were unsure of many things... We never knew who to trust and who was going to stab who in the back... I was disappointed with things but never lost hope. One thing remained with me and kept me going; the thought that someone wonderful was waiting for me at home, my beloved Kiratsa. But, as time passed, my fate sent me in a different direction. I had to fight for my life on a daily basis from the damned officer in charge of the main camp.”

“What kind of a person was this officer?” I asked.

Krsto looked at me and without hesitation said: “Let me say that he behaved like an animal, an animal that likes to torture. There is no animal that enjoyed as much torture as this man. My grandfather used to say: ‘Animals understand you by your scent, people understand you by your word.’ But this man, he was something else!

I used to watch him torturing people and, from the unconscious grimace on his face, the frightening snarl in his voice and from his body jerking and shaking with anger, he looked and sounded twisted, not like a human. He sounded more like a mad, rabid angry wolf in panic. But only a person who has gone through such suffering and pain would know the pain and suffering of a true rebel or of a freedom fighter. They would know what real suffering is...

This person spat on everyone. He did not leave a single rebel alone. He had to beat and spit on all of us to relieve his madness; to relieve his anger. Was this a curse or did God make him this way to punish us? His problem was chronic and incurable. He had a scent about him which we could detect from the distance. As time passed he began to lose his saliva and was unable to spit on us but was killing us with his bad smell. Later he was diagnosed by a top specialist who said he had a disease that attacks the salivary glands, brought on by excessive spitting.”

Krsto paused for a moment, looked down and began to speak again: “The older he got the uglier he looked. His chest was larger than it should have been. When he walked his breasts trembled, especially in the summer. During the extreme heat his breasts clumsily jumped up and down but that did not worry him because his focus was on inflicting pain on others.”

The old man stopped talking, turned towards me, looked me in the eyes and smiled. He then said: “When I think of my walks along ‘fishing’ street in Kostur and of Kiratsa’s first words to me about how she was ‘madly in love with me’, I couldn’t wait to return to my home, to my native Kostur.”

Krsto paused again, looked away and continued: “One day all the prisoners were carrying stones the way they were often forced to do, for no reason. Take them from one place and put them in another... While I was walking along carrying a stone, I heard a voice very quietly say: ‘Krsto watch out for Tsitskarakis... he is following us...’

I looked without turning and out of the corner of my eye, I saw him move sluggishly, like a lazy cat walking around bags full of garbage. The stone was heavy and I still had a long way to go. The sun was up high and burning hot.

Seconds later, there he was in front of me. I was very angry at him because I knew he was reading my letters from Kiratsa. I decided to say something: ‘My soul is burning for home,’ I said, ‘last night I dreamed of my beloved Kiratsa running towards me and throwing herself into my arms... I want to see Kiratsa and my young son Doncho. For days I have had bad thoughts. In her last letter she wrote to me saying that someone has been following my child every day and she does not know what harm will be done to him... I am bothered by my dream... Dreaming of her running towards me is a nice dream... but it bothers me... because she was not alone. In my dream, beside her ran more women, young girls and a few old women. I dream the same dream every day...’

He gave me a dirty look, messed up his hair with his oversized hand, angrily squirmed and lunged at me, determined to kill me. When he hit me in my groin I began to bleed like a slaughtered pig. The sight of my blood gushing sent shivers and panic all over me and I started to scream like a dog being neutered. I went wild. The pain was so great I saw stars. He had smashed my testicles... I was in so much pain I was pulling out my own hair; I was scratching my face with my own fingers... I stood there in front of everyone ashamed of

what had just happened to me. More painful than that was that fact that I was now no longer a man.

The idiot stood there laughing out loud while saliva dripped out of his mouth like a wolf before a feast.

The pain was unbearable, I whined like a dog as bells rang in my head. The pain lasted for days. I could not sleep and when I did sleep I woke up with stiff arms and legs. My suffering was unbearable, not only from my pain but also from the giggling of the man who had done this to me. On top of my pain he had to mock me and shout out loud that he had castrated me! He destroyed my ability to reproduce offspring. That damned rebel seed was dead... (as Karavangelis used to call it... But the Macedonian people knew Karavangelis as a man without a soul).

When last I saw the man that did this to me, saliva was dripping from his big dog teeth as he walked around like a hungry crocodile. He had the murderous passions of a wild man, a beast, and he would not hesitate, not even for a moment, to destroy my pride and humiliate me for no reason at all. What evil possessed him!?? What kind of civilized man who wields power could be so heartless??!

In the camp we were powerless to do anything, so we suffered and suffered horribly.

It did not take long before all kinds of anxieties began to appear in the camps. Anxiety and panic attacks became prevalent and common, which destroyed many lives. Some of the prisoners became obsessed with bacteria and uncleanliness and developed urges to constantly wash their hands.

No prisoner was immune to the beastly acts of this officer and his henchmen so they tended to avoid them at all costs by hiding behind the rocks, well at least until commander Dzimaras's rage subsided.

What did I do to deserve what was done to me? To be sent to Hell! So help me God, I don't know what I did...

I don't remember much of what happened after I was kicked in my groin. My brain simply blocked all memories. I remained frozen with my hands clenched and head down. I was digging at myself with my nails but did not feel pain. My throat became tight and I lost all my strength. Everything became blurry and foggy. Fear stopped me from thinking or talking. I thought I was going to die. Fear took my last breath away.

At that moment my whole world had collapsed, like a house of cards. All I remember is seeing a tear fall on my hand, like a drop of rain, then another and another. I felt many tears rolling down my face, blurring my eyes and washing my cheeks. I cried like a child and my whole body was shaking. That's all I remember.

I was overcome by an overwhelming fear, I thought a monster was born or was produced by the power of the state! Shivers crawled all over me as I watched him giggle...

It was summer. The air around me was hot and burning... but I felt cold. All night long I spent feeling cold and depressed. I lost a part of me that I will never be able to regain."

Krsto looked at me for a moment with a sober look on his face and then looked away. He continued: "Later, after that beast was done with me, a young and handsome sergeant serving in this camp, but born of a good mother, came over to see me. He was shaken by my ordeal and took me into a small tent and left me there. Before leaving he said: 'Try and calm down. The person who did this to you is the most miserable person among all of us here on the island. God will not forgive him for what he did to you. God will not forgive those who inflict pain. Never! Why this fate, why this pain. Dear Lord...'

After the young sergeant left I thought that it was my time to die. I will die now I thought. Then I remembered what my grandfather used to say: 'The happiest person is the person who brings happiness to others and a person who has not suffered knows not how to forgive.'

I was bleeding and trembling with fear and concern. I felt like everything in life had faded away. I was overwhelmed by the sense that I would never understand my fate and why this and why I had to die this way. It was night. It was a dark dawn. There was neither light nor sound. All I could hear were the waves at the seashore splashing and coming closer and closer to my tent. There was not a word to be heard anywhere, only silence, as my ill-fated life hung in the balance in this open space among the rocks.

That night I had a terrible, painful, restless and sleepless night. It was also terribly lonely. Not a single word was spoken, to be heard, to relieve my loneliness. My fate was hanging in the balance but I had no idea how to live or how to surrender to death. A terrible thought came to mind: ‘Who will write my obituary? Will it be the truth...? And how would I know?’

I don’t know when I fell asleep or if I passed out from exhaustion but when I woke I was amazed to be still alive. Life was the strongest miracle in times such as these. But the moment I thought I had learned something was the moment I had to forget it because it led to more pain. I was trying to die but my life was eager to return and so I found myself caught in this endless and silent void. I tried to think about Kiratsa, remembering her long golden blond, braided hair and that’s when I noticed that dawn was breaking. I forgot my pain as I looked up at the beautiful reddish sky becoming brighter with every passing moment...

I closed my eyes because a disturbing thought began to creep into my mind. Why did this man do this to me? What is the limit of shame and sin that this man inflicted on me and what did I ever do to him or anyone else for that matter? Where did such rage come from? These thoughts sent a chill down my spine that surged all through my body, making me shiver, twitch, kick and feel awful. I am now a man whose life has been destroyed and whose future has been ruined.

I was very troubled and felt like I was going crazy... God, my God! What a disaster! My heart trembled and I had long, long thoughts about what to tell her; my beloved Kiratsa who was waiting for

me... Waiting for me for many years so that we could expand our family...”

Old man Krsto stopped talking. Suddenly he looked very sad. He stooped his head forward. I noticed droplets of tears hitting the ground. He took a deep breath and resumed talking:

“I only had a short time left on my sentence and was due to be released in a few months. I had plans to resume my life in my native Kostur with my beloved Kiratsa and with my son Doncho. I was planning to have many more children...”

He stopped talking again, thought for a moment and then looked down at his own crotch. Then he looked at me but had nothing to say. I too stared at him without saying a word.

Then suddenly, breaking the silence, the old rebel Krsto Krapov began to speak and said: “A person who has not lived can never know or understand what life was like in the deserted island Anafi. It is very difficult for me to tell you what I had gone through on the island. Outside of my tortures, the summers were intolerable and the winters were horribly cold.

No person can ever forget that hell. There are moments of that part of my life that I simply don't want to remember and other moments I just don't want to speak about. My life was so insignificant that I barely thought about it, and yet my thoughts keep taking me there...”

The old rebel told me a lot about life in the camp. He also told me that since then no one wanted to get close to him. Nobody wanted to share their lives with him. Then, after he lost his beloved Kiratsa, he was all alone living in a void, in an atmosphere of silence. Life flowed all around him yet he was unable to establish contact with anyone. No one had the desire or was able to help him. Human contact was one of the most essential features in his life.

All the time I sat there motionless, like a statue, and I could not believe my own eyes and ears? After two and a half decades of being absent from my beautiful Kostur, I had finally met a person, willing to die for Kostur, who not only told me intimate parts of his

personal life but played for me the most beautiful Macedonian songs on an instrument I had never seen before; an old instrument that my great ancestors used to play.

Even my thoughts and memories from my own youth began to flood back to me, thanks to this old man and to God for bringing us together. We sat there and talked until midnight and even had a few drinks.

The uncomfortable silence lasted a long time before the old man raised his head, looked at me with sad eyes and asked: “Do you remember the old days...?”

But before I had a chance to reply he began to talk again: “Oh, my good friend,” he said, “You came back to your roots, to your ancestral home, to your memories that hurt the most. You came home where you were born.

The people of Kostur here have closed hearts, obsessed with themselves and their families, skeptical about a bright future and hence immune to disturbing surprises. The war years 1940 – 1949, the Second World War and the Greek Civil War did not bring us together but rather separated us and sent us all over the world. Now I no longer believe in any “great truth” or in any “great people”. There is no longer a need to sell the idea of ‘brotherhood and unity’, but only to respect our differences. While we are living ‘afflicted’ we cannot call the Greeks our ‘brothers’.

Yes, Kostur, our birthplace, is a city which has left many human fates open...” he said and went silent again.

He slowly raised his head, like a person feeling like someone was watching them, looked around and then looked at me. I responded by slowly raising my eyes and then looking into his. I thought to myself: Oh, Jesus, the poor man what he has gone through!

He told me so many things that I did not expect to hear and by now his throat must have tightened because I could hardly hear what he was saying.

He must have realized that he never did answer my question when I asked him who he was so, after mumbling for a while, he piped up and said: “My name is Krsto Krapov and I was the youngest rebel leader during the Ilinden Uprising. My father was Done Krapov. When he died he was buried in an enemy grave. When my mother Vana Krapova heard the bad news her heart broke. I don’t know who buried her or where she was buried. No one wants to talk about those days.

We Macedonians in those days allowed the Greeks to come here but did not think about the problems they would bring us. Those problems seemed very distant then. But now that we are being persecuted and suffering, we are full of worries and feel sick and unsure of ourselves.

Now, every time I think about it, my hands begin to shake. Yes, I am a member of the revolutionary Krapov family. My great-great grandfather Grigor was a fisherman that specialized in catching large carp (krap in Macedonian) and sold his catch at the famous Kostur fish market; hence the name Krapov. The Ottoman too called him Krapov which in time became a respected name.

Now I am living alone. Completely alone! I am left without a family and that is my punishment... Why... I don’t know! I never wronged anyone, yet nobody wants to talk to me and I too don’t want to talk to anyone. I will not accept anything and I would not give anyone anything.

He spread his hands and fingers apart, placed them over his cheeks and began to pull down on his face, stretching his skin on his forehead and over his eyes. Watching him do that made me very sad and very happy to have met such a person, a man who was willing to frankly talk about his past with a complete stranger! I was indeed honoured!

But I do have one regret for which, to this day, I cannot forgive myself and that is about asking him the question: “Did you ever think of committing suicide at the worst times on the island?”

He replied with an abrupt military style answer: “No! Never! My love remained with me like an endless dream full of a rainbow of complex colours. She belonged only to me and we belong to our people, to the people of Kostur...”

I was dazzled by his answer as I began to interpret his words. Then I came back to reality. He was still silent. He was waiting for me to say something. He felt disappointed as I said nothing and that made me very sorry to this day... It was too much for me and I did not know what to say so I said: “The past brought us together!” He then placed his finger on his temple and said:

“Our Kostur, gifted by God to light the path of the Macedonian rebels... Kostur is a spiritual source of our ancient Macedonian and biblical past, a foundation built by our ancestors, and now it is someone else’s; we have allowed it to fall into foreign hands...”
Very powerful words indeed!

I thought a lot about what the old rebel said and I am bothered to this day as to how we have allowed ourselves to be manipulated by outsiders and foreigners and have fallen so low?!

Strangers organized the spirit of our division and divided us into compromised (ELAS and Communists) and uncompromised Macedonians (Rebels, children of the Ilinden Uprising).

I am afraid we were all horribly in love with our slavery... fighting each other for foreign interests in the name of some foreign ideology that made no sense to us... Thinking about it now blows my mind... How could we have been so naïve and stupid?

The Kostur Region villages and Kostur itself looked like a burnt forest. We did this to ourselves when we brought the war home. This was when the Macedonians from ELAS and the Macedonian Communists were fleeing from the war and were looking to save themselves by joining Tito’s army, while fighting the rebels and children of the Ilinden Uprising in Kostur and the Kostur villages. Macedonian ELAS fighters and communists were dreaming of internationalism and foreign ideologies when they were attacking

the Kostur rebels and labeling them “nationalists” and burning their homes.

Thinking about this reminded me of the story of the beasts and the fire: “When the great and powerful beasts were fleeing the terrible fire, only the tiny humming bird with a mouthful of water was flying towards the burning forest. The bigger and smarter beasts warned the little bird that what it was doing was crazy and impossible and its attempts were futile. To that the little bird replied: ‘I am doing this because it is the right thing to do. This is exactly what we all need to do’...” This is a lesson for the people of Kostur. This is exactly what they should have done... stay and fight to defend Kostur and save their homes and their future. The only ones that stayed and fought were the Kostur rebels. Yes, that is exactly what happened but there are some who do not want to admit that we could not have defended our homeland by leaving it.

After they (the Macedonian ELAS fighters and communists) left, many questions were opened for Macedonia’s history!? It was a time, as my grandfather used to say, when: “A wise man had more use of his enemies than a crazy man of his friends.”

The old man made a short throat noise as if wanting to say something. I looked at him and it looked like something was bothering him, something was on his mind. He finally spoke up and asked:

“Why do we think that people in the old days were happier and life was simpler? Why do we continue to reminisce of better times? Why do we look at old photos and feel sad? Why do we listen with admiration to stories of the deeds of our ancestors? Do you want to change something from our past!?”

It was a time when the lives of Macedonians, especially the lives of the people of Kostur Region, were filled with anger and uncertainty. I left a beautiful wife and child, for whom I cared deeply in my heart, who I considered my greatest heritage and when I returned to my sacred home I found my life in ruins.

My grandfather used to say: ‘They separated and divided us and today we hear all sorts of foolishness that a wise person from Kostur needs to be silent in order to protect his hearth, and if he does do that then there will be eternal warmth for them’...”

I said: “You are an honest man...”

Impatiently he replied: “I am a rebel and I always tell the truth! If I was truly a hypocrite do you really think I would have shown you my face?”

He paused for a moment, looked at me and continued: “We lost Kostur in less than ten years (1940 to 1949) because we did not act wisely and responsibly. Exactly in those dire years we divided ourselves into rebels and ELAS fighters without regard to what we were doing to ourselves. We allowed outside propaganda to fill our heads with garbage and acted cruelly against one another. We allowed outsiders to impose their will and lead us into oblivion without any alternatives... We accepted their lies and propaganda wholesale and turned on each other like mad dogs... They wanted a Macedonia without Macedonians and we were only too eager to give it to them. The Greek Andartes (terrorists) causing havoc in Macedonia in 1903 used to say: ‘We want your Macedonia but without Macedonians’!”

I asked him: “Tell me, what kind of people were the rebels?”

He hesitated as he looked at me with his sad, glowing eyes. The silence was long and seemed like an eternity but he eventually came around and said: “Listen compatriot, if we want to be honest and truthful for the sake of our future generations, then we must be open about all this. Our roots stem from here. This is our country and we have the right to be here. We deserve to be here because this is our heritage, our inheritance from our ancestors. We all deserve to return to our hearth, where we were born, where our ancestors were born and lived, where our most precious, sad, happy, angry and painful memories were created. This will be the toughest test yet that we will have to face but the younger generations must return, they must

be allowed to return, our offspring must come home! Our exile was not of our own doing... of our own will. We were lied to and deceived! The chaos that we lived through was ordered and planned by outsiders. They planted false values, immorality, spiritual poverty and illusions into our minds and souls in order to betray us and send us into oblivion. And you ask me what kind of people the rebels were?

I will tell you! I will start from the beginning and I will awaken old, painful times of our past that touched so many of our lives..."

He looked me in the eye and said: "The rebels were ordinary people who decided to face their fears and doubts and stand up to their persecutors and cause unrest. They had nothing to carry in their hands except their courage with which they paved the way to freedom and independence in a country that was theirs. They craved freedom and fought for it with their bare hands against overwhelming odds because they were oppressed and more importantly because they were patriots. Macedonia was a nation of Macedonian people without a country of their own to rule. The only way for them to be free as Macedonians was through a great liberation war, and that is exactly what they did... that's what the Ilinden Uprising was all about... freedom for the Macedonian people as a nation and freedom for Macedonia as their country. No more and no less. Unfortunately that's not exactly what happened; very unfortunate for our people! Outsiders, even in those days, interfered in our affairs and the situation, as you know, went from bad to worse. Our Christian brother neighbours, as it turned out, lied and deceived us. They turned out to be worse than the Ottomans. In 1912 our neighbours rushed in to save us and with our help they drove out the Ottomans. Then in 1913, after they had fought each other for more of Macedonia, they portioned and annexed our country for themselves with us in it..."

We exchanged glances and suddenly I felt uneasy and sensed anger building in the old man. He looked me in the eye and said:

"The rebels may have been radicals but they were level headed people. They never thought of leaving Kostur unprotected. They had virtue and courage to say out loud what they believed: 'Kostur is

ours! Macedonia is our homeland. There is no other Macedonia or another Kostur anywhere in the world! This is our native land!’ All their ideas and discussions were in Macedonia and the Macedonian people’s interest. Now if we are to look at what the other side was doing we will find that the Macedonian communists were discussing events... and not their country. And the small minded ELAS subjects, all they did was discuss people: who is who and so on...

I can tell you that when the Kostur rebels and freedom fighting band were marching through our streets, the people cried because their lives and freedom depended on them. I saw that with my own eyes. The rebel fighters fought for their families, for their villages and for their Kostur, everyone knew that and respected their sacrifices. Macedonians fighting for home, family, village and for Macedonia and not for some foreign ideology that made no sense to them...

Yes, our people placed a lot of hope in the rebel bands and watched them closely and listened to them very carefully. In those days our enemies, particularly Karavangelis and Metaxas, were busy planting hatred in our nation and dividing our people and the people of Kostur into ‘Grkomani’ (Greekophiles) and ‘Bulgaromani’ (Bulgarophiles, or Paleo-Vulgari as the Greeks used to call them). But during the Italian and German occupation, when Greek influence was non-existent in Kostur, our people walked with their heads held high...

Yes, during the rebel marches people were shouting: ‘We are here to witness the Macedonian army to which we are proud to belong!’

Kostur and the surrounding villages echoed with excitement as the church bells rang and all the people, Macedonians, Jews, Vlachs and others, were all out on the street. Only the ‘Grkomani’ stayed home and peeked through their windows and watched the Macedonian rebel army march.

I can see them right now, at this very moment, marching through the centre square.

After that speeches were delivered by Paskal Dobroliski, Vasil Maniatski, Pando Chetirski, Luka Drenovski, Bai Kolio and other chiefs from General Headquarters.

In these days, it was rare to see a Macedonian army marching freely, especially after the failed Ilinden Uprising. It was not the same as when the bands of Vasil Chakalarov, Pando Kliashev, Lazar Poptraikov, Mitre Vlaot, and others were proudly and freely marching through the Kostur villages but it was indeed a sight to see a Macedonian army return to its native soil. This army was not like the armies of Macedonian soldiers serving under foreign flags and commanded by foreign officers, following someone else's orders. This was an all Macedonian rebel army, recognized and accepted by the Macedonian people...

The people took advantage of their freedom and shouted: 'Here we are! This is Macedonia, our country! We are natives of this country!' And they wasted no time in letting their oppressor know... I swear to you, it is all true! Macedonians marched with heads raised up high in their native Kostur. We are the original owners of this country and the Greeks are our occupiers. The occupiers cannot flourish in this country, we will not allow them. Even the Pontians (Turkish Christian settlers brought to Macedonia during the 1920's) cannot flourish in this country because they know that they are invaders, they know that they are not Macedonians and they know very well that they are not even Greeks... because they are Turks!

The rebel leaders also took part in the celebrations in Kostur...

One of the first leaders to speak was Dobroliski. He spoke loud when he said: 'This is a great day for Macedonia. Today is Ilinden, a day of our future, a day of affirmation for the Macedonian Nation! Our enemies will have to come to terms with it! The time has come for us to say we have had enough! No more attacks and killing by these merciless gangs sowing death and destruction in our villages so that foreigners can conquer Macedonia.'

He said: 'We will defend Kostur to the death! At this moment we are all united in one body as the people of Kostur and our hearts are

beating as one for Macedonia and for Kostur, our place of birth! and that's what he said in his speech.”

Krsto Krapov, the old rebel, the old warrior, raised his head up high and said: “What the Kostur rebels did in those days were things that will be long remembered for generations to come. They were the brave and proud sons of Macedonia. They stayed true to their Ilinden ideals and loyal to their fathers and grandfathers.”

He paused for a moment, looked down and continued: “My people were illiterate in their own mother tongue. Not because they were not smart but because they never given the opportunity to read and write in Macedonian. In fact, here in Greek occupied Macedonia, they were prohibited by law to speak their Macedonian mother tongue. But, in spite of everything that was done to stop them, our oral tradition survived. Macedonian mothers continued to speak to their children in the Macedonian language and when the Greeks were gone out of Kostur, the Macedonian language came back out on the streets. Children began to sing Macedonian songs everywhere, songs they had secretly learned from their mothers. There was no person from Kostur, no matter where in the world they lived, that did not sing a Macedonian song, particularly this one:

Mori Chupi kosturchanki,
Rashirete go oroto,
Rashirete go oroto,
Da vi vime fustanite,
Da vi vime fustanite,
Chii e fustan damkalia,
Chii e fustan damkalia,
Da se stora sevdalia,
Po fustanot na chupcheto...”

Old man Krsto Krapov became excited as he sang the song. The veins on his forehead and on his neck began to bulge as if everything that had accumulated over the years in him was about to burst.

I truly had sincere respect for him when I shouted out “What will you drink my friend?” Then I said quietly: “Oh, Jesus, I feel such a relief.”

I was so happy I thought I could fly. Nothing was destroyed, our song echoed again in Kostur, my birthplace.

Silence followed as the old man began to look nervous and uneasy. A moment later he began to speak again.

He said: “I remember the dreadful times I had on the islands... I remember everything... I spent the best years of my life on those desert islands, far away from my home... far away from Kostur... far away from my beloved Kiratsa and my boy Doncho.

I remember Kiratsa’s last words. She was squeezing my hand tight when she said: ‘Krsto, you will be alone... Look for our son...’ This is the legacy she left me with. When I asked her: ‘How many years have you been waiting for me?’ I had a few more words to say but I couldn’t say them... they still remain in me...

With tears in her eyes she replied: ‘Thirty-six years, five months and 12 days...’

Now she is gone. I do miss her very much and every time I think of her I feel sadness, sorrow and turmoil which frustrate my speech and thoughts... She was a strong woman!”

I think this misfortune has affected many Macedonians; we have floundered on the bare islands and in foreign countries for eternity. I can hear my heart beating. When I remember the bizarre things that had taken place I get the urge to laugh and then, right after, to cry.

Oh, that dog, I should not have come back... I should not have killed him, I should have just spat on him, and it bothers me now because I put myself down every time I mention this! It would have been better if I had not returned alive from the island...

I remember the waves of our lake, the Kostur fishermen, the melodies of the magic flute, the colours of the sunset, the aroma of

fried carp... These were memories that made my eyes tear... When I thought of my beloved Kiratsa, I used to hum the song:

Si zalubiv edno mome Kosturianche... (I fell in love with a girl from Kostur...)

Oh, aman, aman...

Padna mome se razbole,

Belo litse potemnelo, oh, aman, aman...

Tsrni ochi zatvorilo... oh, aman, aman..."

I watched the old man cry as he sang. I was certain now that the tears we shed are our best interpreters of our deeply hidden feelings.

He straightened up, wiped away his tears, rubbed his eyes and put his lips together as if wanting to scream and said:

"What have I done to God to punish me so badly...? It would have been better if he had taken my life!"

It was next to a miracle how this man spoke and the command he had of his mother tongue, in spite of what had been done to him. He spoke with a booming voice full of throaty tones and his eyes glowed with tears. He continued:

"The Greeks ruined my ability to reproduce. They took my right to have offspring, to be part of my people, to be part of the human race in the future. That essentially was their goal, to end our line... They killed me in an underhanded way, only my soul knows how that feels..."

I had a bad dream that started on the Island. I dreamed that dream for years, first on the island and then in Kostur after I returned home. It was a dream that frightened me without knowing exactly how and why it frightened me. And so I sat in my tent motionless, petrified, without life, without a soul, not knowing where to look or where to turn... I dreamed that dream for years, I dreamed about the man who castrated me..."

The old man's face began to twist as a sign of the pain he was feeling deep inside and after taking a loud and violent breath, he continued:

“From then on until today, everyday I thought and hoped that one day, my people would take revenge for all the evil inflicted on us... But, as it turned out, our people have gone silent and will not speak about what was done to us... they will not speak about the atrocities committed against our people by the Greeks, nor will they tell the world about us...”

Krsto Krapov looked at me with a sober and disappointed look on his face as the sharp look in his glowing eyes began to fade.

I felt I needed to say something so I said: “The kind of people that keep secrets like that will certainly feel isolated and distant from everyone and will believe that all governments, no matter what kind, will be a threat to their lives.”

The old man suddenly looked at me with animated eyes and said:

I have never been one of those who hides things... who is filled with hatred, anger and helplessness. When I have something to say, I say it. When I have nothing to say, I keep quiet. But there is something that did appear in the people of Kostur not too long ago. We split ourselves into freedom fighters and Communists (people in love with their bondage). Long ago this split did not exist in Kostur, America, Australia, or Canada, in Tashkent and Europe, and not in Belgrade, Sofia, Athens... No one hated us as much as we have come to hate ourselves because of this split. We continued to hate ourselves even after we realized the split would have devastating consequences for us. Urged by outsiders who we befriended and who we followed at their beck and call, we joined them and they helped us hate ourselves and our kind until there was nothing left of us at home. But we continue to hate ourselves in favour of ideology outside of our homes... still as freedom fighters or Communists... We learned well how to hate from Karavangelis, the Bishop of Kostur. The Ottomans were amongst us for five centuries but never did find the time to teach us how to hate one another... we learned that from the Greeks... And in the end, the Greeks gave us new

names, which forced us to forget ourselves and to fight against our own heritage which took us centuries to build... They taught us to hate our grandfathers and great grandfathers and the very seed to which we belong...

We Macedonians have been pushed to the brink of extinction by everyday cruel Greek deeds and laws that hang over us like huge boulders ready to fall. Our families and homes have also been targets... everyday they push us to exile... cast us out of our homes... without a care for the pain and suffering they have caused us....

Well, this is what has been happening to us since our country was occupied by the damned Greeks!!!”

The old man’s voice was getting more penetrating as pain flowed through his thoughts; as he traveled through visible and invisible time in his mind. He was not doing this just to ease his own soul, he was doing it because something hidden deep inside him was boiling and rebelling and he wanted to tell the world...

His eyes looked strange. They were very bright like they had their own source of light deep inside.

I stood there and listened. I listened to this old man who had suffered for over half a century. The silence was indeed unbearable. It was especially unbearable because something very important, something of historical significance was being told. A stranger was unweaving his life’s story before me. But we were not strangers. Our common experiences and our mutual love of our homeland made us friends and brought us close together. I remember what my grandfather used to say: “Once and for all, fear must be defeated and victory over fear is the beginning of wisdom...”

How late am I?

I bowed my head. Whatever his story was I was very sorry for him and as such I forgot my own problems. Yes! But was it just me? Was it just the people of Kostur!?

Again, half a century later, one is able to grasp the misfortune but only to some extent. When a person passes that step (and we have long passed it) misfortune will destroy that person (it will destroy the person's ancestral roots). The person will then become indifferent like us, the people of Kostur.

That was a time when love was very short and forgetting about it was endless. It was a time when the Greeks were forcing us to accept falsehood over the truth.

And maybe that's why there is nothing more difficult to talk about than our own suffering... When I looked at him again I saw how downtrodden he was.

I asked myself, "Is it honourable to cause suffering to others, even when the deepest human wishes inevitably lead to it?"

I did not notice but I too had tears running from my eyes as I listened to him.

He shook his hand and looked at me with compassion. With a raspy voice he then said: "Cry, empty the poison from your soul. Take it out so that it doesn't burden you all your life..."

In the end we will not remember the insults of our enemies but what is eating at me now is the silence from our brethren, the people of Kostur and all of Macedonia who are drifting around the world; the people who built their silk nests out there and who abandoned their home and birthplace. The people who left us, the ill-fated, to endure the pain of the loss of our fatherland...

But they are the ones who suffer the most and will suffer all the way to their graves. Those who are far away from their fatherland, from this country, who spent their youthful years in their fatherland and who left part of their love there, will endure the pain the most. They will remember when spring was a time of love. They will remember that spring was a happy life for love-sick bachelors who could hardly wait for its arrival...

Now, all the survivors who have left their homeland will feel the loneliness and nostalgia for home sweet home and their love for it will forever burn into their souls. They will want to sing the age-old song that was sung by many Kostur generations...

“Lepi chupi i zalubeni bekiari: Tvoite ochi Leno mori...”

A wild roar came from the crowd of people from Kostur who were in the mood for a song.

O Krsto! Let them sing our song!

Sing “KRENA MATINATA” a loud voice ordered!

Krena Martina, mori mamu, fati planinata,
Tana – na – na – na – na – tanana – na – na, oide na Lokvata.
Tamu se sobrale, mori mamu, od pet sela detsi,
Ai ot pet sela detsi, mila mamu, ot tri sela chupi.
Chupite D’mbenski I chupite Smdetski ne se teku lepi,
Glaso mu se krena, mori mila mamu, mnogu na daleku, do Soluna
grada.
Lepite detsi, mamu mori,
Enash te opuvle, mori mila mamu, I te opianve.
Aj enash shom zapee, mila mamu, umo ti go kreve

The entire crowd joined the dance which continued deep into the night and the songs were heard all the way to Mount Vicho...

Shcho si tolku Leno mori, gailelia...

Chapter two - Kostur and its magnificent panoramas

“Our ancestral homes look very beautiful from here. Can you see the beautiful wooden verandas on the other side? It is so nice to look at one and admire it like it was something of yours that you love and cherish...” said Krsto Krapov, sitting next to me.

1. It was morning. The sun had risen and revealed all the beauty of Lake Kostur. It was breathtaking. Dawn in Kostur is hard and grey and sometimes stormy. Today the sky was unexpectedly clear but to me it looked flashy and full of raindrops. Perhaps it was my watery eyes that made it look like that... I don't know. Every morning I get up and go searching..., searching in the old churches looking for traces of my ancestors. They were pious, humble and extraordinarily hardworking people who served God. I follow in their footsteps and I feel them; I measure their greatness and dedication. Our home has no doors, no windows and the cobblestone path is densely overgrown with grass. It looked like a heap of debris under the open sky. Sometime ago, in sadder times, a lot of wine was drunk here as the streets slowly aged without the running and laughing of children...

Oh God! How I love the home of my ancestors! I remember my mother and grandmother Ianka looking after me right here in this yard. My mother died in Poland and was buried somewhere there. My grandmother Ianka died here in Kostur but I don't know where she is buried...? I don't know where their graves are... Not of my mother, or my father and not of my grandmother. My father was killed on the Italian front fighting for Greek interests and for the Greek king.

I cried uncontrollably and teardrops fall on the ground one after another... It hurt me deep inside when I looked at this house, my grandfather's house where he proudly talked about the Ilinden days and about our proud people.

I played and grew up here, in this house. There was the old quince tree whose aroma reminded me of my childhood. When I was born, my grandmother buried my umbilical cord under the roots of this tree. And now I stand here like a “stranger in my own country”, in

the house where I was born and grew up. This is unreal for me and I feel like I am not here... I feel like a blade of grass in the wind in a strong storm being swirled around and beaten from all sides... I stand here chained before the ruins of my home, which I left during a difficult time. I struggle to find the meaning of why I am being punished in such a severe way? What did I ever do to deserve this isolation and to be cast out of something that I love so much... To be exiled to roam the world... What did I ever do? All my good memories were created right here...

It was right here when, one dark night, Markos's Parisans came and violently mobilized me and took me away without allowing me to say goodbye. I left without even a goodbye... My beloved ones cried for me... They cried for me for years! I go numb when I think about it. Even to this day...

I was overwhelmed by a strange pain. I felt shaky and my legs were getting weak. I leaned against the wall. I felt sick to my stomach. The truth was cruel to me... The truth was that I was standing in my father's courtyard... The truth is a human principle when we encounter what belongs to us. Lord, please give me strength and patience! Now nothing belongs to me except my pain and my memories... Not even this heap of rubble and ashes. But...?

The people of Kostur say: Your soul will remain at the very place where you take your first drink of water...

You can't get away from the love and hope when you encounter something that belongs to you...

The first question I asked Krapov was: "Is there any evidence that suggests that before Kostur was occupied by the Greeks (1912 – 1913), there were Greeks living there?!"

Krsto Krapov stood up straight, raised his hand and moved it along the edge of the city limits outlining Kostur and began to talk about the city's history, long banned by the Greeks:

“Kostur is one of the most beautiful cities in Macedonia, now under Greek occupation, a city with its own serene and tranquil nature but with a very rich and long history.

Kostur is a city with Byzantine architecture and a large number of Byzantine and post Byzantine monuments as well as a lot of remnants from the construction carried out by our Tsar Samoil.

Yes, we are heirs of Tsar Samoil. Even our character betrays us. There is no serious academic who does not believe in the bloom of Tsar Samoil’s kingdom. Chills trickle down my spine when I hear people saying Kostur was Greek and now even the colonists, Karamani and Pondi from Turkey, are drowned in this kind of propaganda, saying that they are the descendants of King Samoil and declare themselves Macedonian!”

A CENTURY OF SILENCE SINCE THE ARRIVAL OF THE GREEKS (1913 - 2013)

“An unexplored life is not worth living!” (Socrates)

“How and why did Greece declare war on our Macedonian civilization in this occupied part of Macedonia?” I asked.

The old man looked up and said: “Every Greek government since the early beginnings of modern Greece, created for the first time in history in 1829, endeavored to erase everything Macedonian. It strove to erase the feeling of belonging to the Macedonian nation, to the Macedonian identity and to stop Macedonians from speaking their Macedonian language.

In fact we were under Ottoman slavery for over 500 years but our rulers never banned or replaced our language with theirs. We spoke our language freely. But the moment the Greeks occupied our Macedonia, our native Macedonian language was strictly banned from being spoken in public, or in private.”

Krapov abruptly adjusted himself and, with excitement in his voice, said: “I am ready and determined to declare the following to the

entire Macedonian nation: ‘The Greeks came to Macedonia after their own Nation State was established as a Kingdom with one King, with one Nation of people, one Church and one Language. Greece, with Great Power help, was established as a Nation State for the first time in history after its struggle for independence (1821-1829). After its independence, again with Great Power help, Greece made several territorial expansions (1864 to 1947). Greece was not only helped but was directly supervised by the Great Powers who interfered in its internal affairs. Greece was established as a Nation State with its own unique identity, religion, education, culture and science with direct assistance from the Great Powers before it occupied Macedonia.’

Greek governments not only banned everything that was Macedonian, but they also hunted down Macedonians and humiliated them for being Macedonian. Moral and ethical values were forced upon the Macedonian people by these same Greeks who occupied and enslaved our Macedonia. In the process they banned everything Macedonian, including all sorts of cultural and even the musical events. Our songs, dances and all kinds of traditions were forbidden and along with that came forced assimilation and total destruction of the Macedonian people... What horror!”

I silently said: “God protect us and defends us from such evil!”

“Look!” said Krapov, thinking for a moment.

“I can see that you are a man consumed with longing for your fatherland. The people of Kostur, many have said, were well known for being good Christians with strong love, faith and hope. But what happened? Well, after our national traditions and cultural events were banned, we were violently forced to become Greeks. We were strictly forbidden from practicing our Kostur culture, from celebrating traditional holidays, from having traditional weddings and funeral rites. We were instructed to declare that we were Greeks and then they issued us Greek documents.

And as Milan Kundela put it: ‘The destruction of a nation.’ ‘The first step to destroying a nation is to delete its memory; to destroy its scripture and its books; its culture and its history. The second step is

for someone else, a foreigner, to write new books; to form a new education system, to re-educate it and to invent a new history for it.’

It would not take too long before people would start to forget who they are.

Once they start forgetting, the rest of the world all around them will forget them even faster.

This was the crazy Greek plan all along; to fiercely attack everything Macedonian and in the process destroy the Macedonian people.

The Greek essence was to eliminate the Macedonian people by destroying their Macedonian roots, their Macedonian soil and their Macedonian tree and replace it with a Greek planted tree.”

Old man Krapov became very rebellious when he was faced with an attack on his Macedonian identity, which happens practically every day everywhere in Greek occupied Macedonia and not just in his native Kostur. This is what the Greeks have done to us and being a Macedonian is taboo in Greece. It’s been this way since the Greeks came here. “Those people here who speak very loudly about injustices and are enraged and say that the world could be a better place to live, only whisper when it comes to the Macedonian question,” said Krapov, which really upset me.

Meaning, in this way the Greeks wanted to keep the illusion alive that only “Greeks by genus” lived in Greece. This Greek position, as a means to an end, is an everyday dance that celebrates and strengthens their artificial identity, which allows Greece to declare that only Greeks by birth live in Greece and that Greece is a pure nation consisting strictly of Greek people and nothing else. And who exactly are these Greeks outside of the various ethnicities assimilated into the Greek fold? I have yet to meet one such person!

We Macedonians, especially after World War II, without looking at the striking Greek genocidal project put into effect since before 1913, to eliminate us to the last one, responded to them as if they were our brothers. Macedonians! Open your eyes! A man who is

squeezing the last drop of blood from your body cannot possibly be doing it for your own good! Please open your eyes!

We Macedonians never agreed to become Greeks! We proved that during the Greek Civil War (1945-1949). And now the entire civilized world knows that: “A nation can be created from a myth. The Greeks succeeded in doing exactly that! We have been persecuted for over 70 years now. They have taken our properties, our citizenship and will not even recognize us as citizens of Greece.”

Old man Krapov was now calm. He stood up from the rock he was sitting on and, with a smile on his face, said:

“I don’t know whether you know this or not but Kostur is an international centre for treatment, processing, production and sale of fur and fur products. The famous Kostur fur and leather goods production has operated for centuries along a well-established Kostur tradition. Production of fur in Kostur was the oldest and only craft produced by the people of Kostur with explicit imperial permission. The most wealthy Ottomans traveled to Kostur all the way from Tsari Grad (Istanbul) to purchase the most beautiful dresses for the women in their harems. Kostur produced the most modern clothes in the empire in the entire Balkans.

The population of Kostur had a reputation for being a very traditional community, strongly attached to its Macedonian roots and language, especially to its famous local Kostur dialect... The women who lived in Kostur dressed beautifully in vibrant traditional dresses with their long hair flowing like silk. Especially beautiful were the young unmarried ladies dressed in the most modern and beautiful clothing, standing on their balconies or in front of their windows, driving the bachelors wild.

After the Second World War, a large part of the indigenous population was persecuted and exiled and now lives all over the world. It is very rare now to meet a person from Kostur who will

speak to you in the Kostur dialect and ask you: ‘Are you one of ours?’

Now nobody respects anything, I do not know why...?” concluded the old man as he drifted off somewhere in his own memories.

My grandfather used to say: “When children are torn from the embrace of their motherland and take their own path in life there will no longer be weddings in their old home. They will leave behind a wasteland. The old will sit in the yard with eyes closed and in silence beg the rain to come and wash their tears away. They will be left with only their memories...”

I took a walk down a cobblestone street and passed some narrow alleys, following in the footsteps of my ancestors and stopped in front of a house. It was now occupied by Prosfigi... strangers from Asia Minor. There is very little that I remember from my childhood. But I do remember some striking things which make me emotional to talk about even now. Further down my old neighbourhood I recognized another house and in the backyard I noticed an old woman, a Madzhir from Smirna (Asia Minor), which I found out later, wearing wooden shoes and humming away as she was spreading her colourful Pontian dress, with all its nuances, on a line to dry. I had no idea where my old neighbours were. Obviously they had been persecuted and made to leave but where did they go? I don't know. They were cheerful and good neighbours.

Are they alive or are they dead? I felt my entire body tightening and cramping and a chill ran down my spine.

I had to step away. I was not feeling good. I had forgotten a lot about this place and now I did not want to remember anything at all. I did not want to accept today's life and I couldn't come to terms with this place, which is why I had to walk away. I spit on the ground and felt like a homeless drifter... I felt disgusted...

I spent my entire life searching. Every time I found something I left it and continued on searching. I am disgusted when I think of how much of my time I wasted searching and how little of my life I have left.

Here in Kostur, in my own hometown, I am forced to keep quiet; a person must keep quiet to protect themselves...

What irony that the Prosfigi are now the owners of our country, our homes and we are forced to go elsewhere to find a home. They “cleansed” our country of us...

The communists who led us in the Greek Civil War and encouraged us by saying: “We are fighters and internationalists...” left us to wander the world, to become eternal wanderers. I cannot carry that secret all my life. I am telling you, I cannot hold out. I can’t live detached from everything familiar and dear to me. My life is passing me by... before my eyes.

Suddenly, old man Krapov raised his head, looked at me with a sharp look in his eyes and began to talk again.

He must have heard me talking to myself when he said: “Every drifter and wanderer knows and every person must get it into their heads that we are “victims of the Macedonian ideological activists (communists)”.

WITH THE ARRIVAL OF THE GREEKS THE PEOPLE OF KOSTUR FORGOT HOW TO LAUGH HEARTILY

The sky above Kostur was cloudy and the old mountains, laden with the bones of heroes, were full of unwritten history. Everything was silent. It seemed like the great exodus was finally over; the echoes of the song, the sound of gunfire, the blessing of a mother’s words to her children and the cursing of widows... My dear God, such terrible memories... it hurts me to think about them even today...

The finest and most beautiful things in my native Kostur cannot be seen or touched. They must be felt with the heart. But I know the people of Kostur were very proud by the very fact that they belonged to Kostur and to Kostur Region. But ever since the Greeks came here, the people of Kostur have forgotten how to laugh

heartily. This is what old man Krapov had said to me earlier. But from my own experience I remember my grandmother Ianka, who did not speak a word of Greek, whisper to me: “I have a lump right here in my throat. I swallow but the lump will not go down, I can’t free myself.” She was whispering because she did not want to be heard... because she was afraid of something... or someone...

“Kostur is old,” continued old man Krapov, “but we know very little about its age. It has been written in an age-old yellowed book that: ‘Kostur is situated on the Goritsa Peninsula’, on the western shore of the lake, at 690 metres above sea level and was named with a Latin name; the Latin name of the ‘beaver’, the creature with the best fur of all the animals that lived here.

According to Ottoman records, the people of Kostur were of Royal Lineage stretching back to Tsar Samoil who ruled here in Macedonia during the Byzantine period.

Kostur is a very old city and there are records of it that stretch back to Roman times. There is one piece of information from the Byzantine period which read: ‘The city of Kostur, for the first time, gained its independence and became an independent Macedonian national community sometime back in 990, when Tsar Samoil ruled’. Tsar Samoil freed Kostur and the city remained under Macedonian rule until 1385 when it fell under Ottoman slavery (1385-1913).

When the Ottomans ruled Kostur they built many significant buildings, some of which lasted to this day. A couple of these were: ‘The Great Gate’ and ‘The Fortified Neighbourhood’ among other special Turkish settlements.

There were three large settlements and fur-processing workshops and in between the settlements were Ottoman cemeteries. The Ottomans settled mostly in the ‘Dolcheto’ area. There were schools and three inns operating beside the ‘Kurshum’ (Bullet) Minaret and several seminaries.

At about the same period of time, in the 15th century, a Jewish community, consisting mostly of merchants, began to settle in

Kostur. The Jews were good people and very wise, they did not want power, they only wanted to make money. They respected family values.

In the 18th century Kostur's population composition was: 940 Macedonian, 22 Muslim and 93 Jewish families. The city had around 12,000 inhabitants, of whom 7,000 were Macedonians, 3,500 Ottomans and 1,500 Jews.

In more recent years we lost the Ottoman, Jewish and Macedonian populations living in Kostur. We lost the Ottoman community with the Lausanne Treaty population exchanges between Greece and Turkey. We then lost the Jewish community to the genocidal Nazi's in the Second World War when Nazi Germany invaded Europe and collected all the Jews. Then, between 1940 and 1950 we lost a great deal of the Macedonian community to Greek persecution and Greek genocide.

Then in 1923 the Greek government brought colonists and settlers, known as Profigi or Madzhiri, to Kostur and Kostur Region from Asia Minor, as it did in all of Greek occupied Macedonia. Around 28,000 (27,796) people were settled in Kostur Region alone. Around 640,000 (638,253) people in total were settled in Greek occupied Macedonia. The Greek aim here was, no doubt, to get rid of the Macedonians from their native lands and replace them with Turkish colonists and settlers who would have no choice but to be loyal to Greece.

In a short period of time Greece changed the ethnic composition of Macedonia, one of its many genocidal acts against the Macedonian people. During the same period Greece imported around 1,150,000 people in its territory, all colonists and settlers from Asia Minor, all Christians but not ethnic Greeks," concluded the old man who then went silent... but not for long.

A few moments later old man Krapov look up, pointed with his hand towards the mountain and said: "It is a wonderful sight to see Kostur from up there, from 'Goritsa'. It's a beautiful site..."

You have not lived to see Kostur unless you have climbed the highest peak in 'Goritsa' and looked down on the city and the lake. The lake's deep blue water is magically captivating. If you look closely you will see thousands of carp leaping in the clear blue water. You will witness the beauty of the clouds flying above and being reflected in the lake water. The lake is a magnificent marvel of nature especially with my most favoured city nestled by it... From time to time I go up there, to the top of the hill and look down at my little world. I also love to walk through the forest up there. While looking down I sometimes feel like the place is immortal and will live forever, just like the mountains. Other times I feel like it is a fragile eco system; the green growth, the birds and animals... all living harmoniously together. I often look down the winding road, curving along the peninsula with its unseen beauty, a paradise for lovers, with many café's and restaurants. But the most beautiful of all the places are the many churches. The older churches were built before the Greeks set foot on this place. Many famous people have spent many nights here including some of our famous freedom fighters and rebel commanders belonging to Macedonia's liberation movements. They used to quote Tsar Samoil whose slogan was: 'This is my part of the world!' Then, after the Greeks occupied Macedonia, the slogan became: 'We want Macedonia without Macedonians'..." concluded Krapov, looking at me with a sad look on his face.

The old man turned his head and looked towards the lake. He then began talking again: "When you turn your back towards the lake, everything in Kostur is downhill. Streets climb up towards the houses and the houses stand one behind another as if wanting to hide from you. When you look up you see the elevation turn into hills, then to mountains and then to great big mountains starting with Mount Vicho. Then when a heavy breeze blows along the surface of the lake, water is pushed up the roads and into the wide yards of the houses. Under the village Aposkep, the water reaches as high as those large maple trees over there where the common grave is, where many Ilinden freedom fighters and rebels were buried." He stopped talking but only for a moment.

The old man re-composed himself as if recovering from an overwhelming emotional reaction and with a raspy trembling voice said: “My ancestors... my roots... my ancestors are from Aposkep, the greatest revolutionary village in Macedonia...”

He then turned away facing north and while pointing into the distance he said: “There it is! Exactly 6 km north of Kostur resting at an altitude of 840 metres, at the foot of Mount Sveti Ilia. To the north it borders with the villages Setoma and Seshtevo, to the south it borders Kostur, the city, and the village Zhupanishta. To its east are the villages Tiolishta, Kondorabi and Fotinishta, and to the west is the village Sliveni.

Early in the twentieth century 750 residents lived in Aposkep, all Macedonians. There were 120 families living in two distinct neighbourhoods; east and west. Dividing the two neighbourhoods was a large natural spring, a major source of water for the village. It was said that the water flowed down from Lake Prespa. Villagers, even today, remember the phenomenon that the water flowing from the spring was warm in the winter and cool in the summer. They called it a gift from God.

The village was built in a very interesting location, which at one point in time was a huge dip full of lush vegetation encircled by mountains. Because of the location's shape the Ottomans named it ‘APUS KUP’ which roughly translates to ‘Large Earthen Pot’. According to local lore, the village was founded when a member of the Tanaskovi family, a cow herder, lost a cow. When he went looking for it he found it grazing in this place which he thought would make an excellent pasture for his cows. After returning home, which was quite far from this place, he immediately told his relatives about it and advised them to go and build new homes in this location. And thus this fertile and rich in water piece of land became the family's future habitat. Well, at least this is what the old folks told us back in the old days.

The land was very fertile and, in addition to it being used for pasture, in time most villagers began to farm and cultivate it including planting vineyards. Aposkep was one of the most famous

producers of wines using a widely popular grape later termed “Aposkepsko Grozie” (Aposkep Grape). Over the years both grapes and wine were sold in the Kostur, Lerin and even in the far Kozheni markets.

Soon after the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) was created in Solun, with aims at freeing the entire Macedonian population from Ottoman autocracy, a local branch was established in Aposkep. The first organizers were Lazo Luarov, Naum Fotev Bozhinov, Lazo Ginov, Dine Trupanov and Stoian Bakalov.

Aposkep is located at the junction between three Kostur regions Koreshtata, Popole and Kostenariata. All these regions were organized by IMRO and anyone who wanted to travel from one region to another had to pass through Aposkep.

The Ilinden Uprising began on July 20, 1903 (August 2, 1903 by the new calendar) before which revolutionaries and local Aposkep fighters gathered at the St. Ilia Church on the mountain. Just before the revolt began 300 insurgents had gathered. Stoian Bakalov, one of their commanders, made a speech to urge Macedonians to fight, during which he said:

‘Brother Macedonians! The day which we awaited for years has arrived. Grab your guns and go out there and fight for your freedom, free yourselves from the Ottoman yoke.’ After that all the commanders lined up and gave speeches. Included among them were Lambro Braov, Pando Popovski and Tanas Iorgov. Minutes later another 60 villagers arrived, picked up guns and joined the ranks of the freedom fighting bands.”

Looking slightly angry, old man Krapov said: “And as you can see there were no Greeks... and there was nothing Greek here... They brought those miserable colonists from Asia Minor and established them on our lands which we worked so hard to make habitable and kicked us out... Now tell me, how long are we going to go on ‘proving’ to them that we are Macedonians? Can our past be deleted so easily? In these villages?! And especially here in Kostur... in the heart of Macedonia?!!”

The old man recomposed himself and continued: “I remember everything that my grandfather told me and he explained things in detail. He said nothing about our grandfathers, great grandfathers, and great – great grandfathers being anything other than Macedonian. There is nothing in our oral tradition or in our collective memory of us being anything but Macedonian... What else can I tell you?”

I clearly remember my grandfather Dorcho telling me that the Ilinden Uprising in Kostur lasted two and a half months and that the Macedonian population massively participated in it. Not only were they fighting with guns and giving up their lives but they also donated food, clothing and other necessities. Most of the fighters in the insurgency came from Kosur Region and many became casualties of the war with very large losses. Everyone suffered from that, especially the families of the bread earners who were killed. Unlike in other areas where the insurgencies lasted only a few days or at maximum a couple of weeks, the fighting in Kostur lasted nearly three months, without it being crushed. Military action was terminated only because IMRO General Headquarters ordered it. So, unlike in Krushevo for example, where the insurgents suffered defeat after ten days of fighting and had to accept capitulation, the insurgents in Kostur Region fought a guerrilla war, which was only ended by their own decision.

By October 14, 1903, when rebel General Headquarters decided to end all military action, the Kostur fighters had participated in 17 battles in which 4,170 rebels had clashed with 30,360 Ottoman soldiers. In that time 83 rebels and 513 Ottoman soldiers were killed. By the time the fighting ended 2,750 Macedonian homes had been burned down, which amounted to twenty-eight percent of the total number of houses in Kostur region. As a result of this 15,650 people were left homeless and 413 civilians were killed. They were killed in the countryside in retaliation by Ottoman forces.

With their contribution, the people of Kostur gave their all to the Ilinden Uprising which no one can deny. Their struggle lasted the longest and produced the largest number of victims. The fate of that struggle was such that unfortunately today it is almost forgotten.

The Ottomans, military generals in particular, have argued that by now they were accustomed and not embarrassed to admit that the Macedonian rebels during the Ilinden uprising had fought like lions and can be considered the heroes of that war.

Some have even said that: “Heroes have fought like Macedonian rebels...”

A CENTURY OF SILENCE

“What I want to do now is show you some differences between the Ottomans and the Greeks from a human perspective...” said the old man and continued:

“In 1908, during the Young Turk Uprising, a common grave was built in Aposkep where all prominent Macedonian leaders who died in the Ilinden Uprising were buried. Buried in this common grave were Vasil Chakalarov, Pando Shindov, Pop German Chikovski from the village Chereshnitsa and many other revolutionaries from the Ilinden Uprising, as well as their relatives and other victims of the war.

But when the Greeks occupied Macedonia in 1912, 1913 the so-called Greek Andartes (Illegal Greek-sponsored armed bands roaming inside Macedonia) and the Grkomani (Macedonians supporting the Greek cause) dug up the tombs in the Aposkep common cemetery and scattered the bones of those buried in it throughout the fields and meadows. They then filled the graves with stones and sang songs while doing this.

One of the songs they sang went something like this: ‘Chakalarov is gone, Macedonia is gone, we destroyed Chakalarov and with him all his followers!’...”

Old man Krapov’s face suddenly changed. He looked angry and overwhelmed by sadness. He looked like he had been deeply violated. There was bitterness in his voice when he said: “HOW HORRIBLE!!”

He paused for a moment, recomposed himself and continued: “That day was ‘The day of the Souls’ a holiday honouring the day of the founding of the Christian church. Remembering the dead on that day was a tribute to their souls... It is the same with all Christians everywhere.

What the Andartes and Grkomani did that day was a terrible sin, more confirmation of the dangers and consequences of nationalism and populism as it is cherished in Greece. Their gain and exultation came from brutally insulting the dead, which shows not only disrespect for us and our history but also reveals the kind of savage people they are, getting joy from other people’s pain and suffering! And they call themselves civilized and Christians? Our Greek invaders are uncivilized un-Christian savages... I have seen what they are capable of... and believe me friend evil deeds speak a lot louder than words...!”

I swallowed hard. I felt like my own pride was choking me so I felt I needed to say something. I turned towards the old man and before I had a chance to open my mouth, he began talking again:

“After the Ilinden Uprising was ended and we lost our bid to free ourselves, more Greeks from Greece, especially Greek Andartes (1), began to infiltrate Macedonia with aims at completely extinguishing IMRO and all its affiliates.

We all know about the kind of heroism our rebel bands showed during the fighting but I want to tell you something about a place called Sliveni. There too was a large common cemetery in which IMRO members were buried; among whom were the leaders Mitre Vlaot, Lazar Poptraikov, Petre Naumov from Aposkep and many others, about 60 in total. Our people, including my own family, with great pride every year laid flowers on these tombs; that is until 1913...

But the sickest thing that happened was after that, after the 1913 Greek occupation of Macedonia when the Greek government ordered the cemetery’s destruction in the most disgusting way. Not only did the Greeks destroy our cemetery but to ensure that we would never visit it again they created a Greek cemetery on top of it

and buried the likes of Pavlos Melas (real name Mikis Zezas) (2), born in Mesalia Epirus, and forced our (Macedonian) people to worship him.

The destruction of the cemeteries where the Ilinden Uprising fighters and heroes of Macedonia were buried and expected to rest for eternity, has shown how barbaric the Greeks and our most current occupiers can be... They want no less than to erase everything Macedonian... our entire Macedonian heritage... centuries of Macedonian culture and civilization... And what are we doing? WE ARE KEEPING SILENT! And who benefits from our silence? Our occupiers... our executioners... of course! And why are we keeping silent...? You tell me! To keep our executioners happy?!

But the scariest period of our existence was when the dictator Metaxas (1936) came to power. At that time almost the entire village of Aposkep was sent to jail to the dry, desert Greek islands.

I also want to emphasize what happened on the Greek-Italian front. As soldiers of the Greek army, 36 young Macedonian men from Aposkep gave their lives fighting for Greece. Included among them were Panaiot Mishaikov, Spaso Bubev and Micho Pochev. The village became quite active during the Greek Civil War and many sacrificed themselves for Macedonia's freedom. Sadly no one cares...

Frankly, the Macedonian people were seduced to join the Greek Civil War. It was all lies and deceit...

Today, Aposkep is peaceful and humble, many of the former villagers are scattered all over the world and the Greek government will not allow them to return home because they are NOT Greeks by birth. If they were born here and were indigenous to these lands and, as Greeks claim: 'only Greeks live in Greece and Macedonia was always been Greek' then what else could they possibly be? Or putting it another way, 'How can they possibly be anything other than...?' But obviously, by some logic that only Greeks can understand, they are NOT Greeks by birth... So there you have it...

Well, after I came back from the island... from then onwards I lived an unhappy life full of guilt..."

As the old man spoke his facial expressions began to slowly change. His eyes seemed to go darker and turn from bright to ash gray...

The Church bells in Kostur Region ring every morning on Sundays and holidays.

"Kostur," old man Krapov said, "will seduce you with its mystery and you will not know what to expect. This is especially true with young people.

Unfortunately as time passes there are less and less true Kostur-ians (people of Kostur) in Kostur... their memories of Kostur died off somewhere out there. They are now gone forever...

Kostur, over the years, like most other cities in Greek occupied Macedonia has gone through significant changes. The centuries old traditions are being chipped away and less and less remain of them as time passes. The 27,796 new colonists and settlers, otherwise known as 'Prosfigi', 'Madziri', or 'Pondi' settled here from distant Asia Minor after the Balkan Wars and after World War I (1919 - 1922), have been slowly changing the scene.

As soon as they arrived here they were settled in different parts of the city and they not only brought alien things here, they also ripped out everything that was Macedonian. Now Kostur breathes a lot differently...

But fortunately, there are centuries old historic characteristics still hidden in this great mix of today's modernity, even some that have been brought from Asia Minor. People are like migrating birds; they bring some things, take some things and then disappear...

Let me tell you what the old people from Kostur knew and that we should also know. Hidden under these old walls in the heart of Kostur are fabulous secrets which our ancestors left behind. Buried

in the rubble are temples and all kinds of historical remnants lying under the debris all forgotten... The truth about us is hidden deep under those old walls...”

Old man Krapov paused for a moment, sighed and resumed talking:

“I remember the many famous Kostur church bells ringing very early in the morning on Sundays and during major Christian holidays. Many of these bells were forged and brought here from Russia and the Ukraine. Many people from Kostur Region are now far away from the sounds of those church bells... Oh how lonely for them it must be... They are our brothers and sisters... Surely they must miss the sounds of Kostur’s church bells every Sunday... Those sounds reverberated all the way to Russia... Oh those lonely people away from Kostur now living quiet and unremarkable lives... being lost to time...”

During important holidays it was customary for the people of Kostur to openly celebrate as a community but since the Greeks banned these celebrations people have forgotten that they even existed. Most holidays that the Kostur people celebrated were based on the Bible and were mainly seasonal holidays associated with the harvest or with historical events.

I remember as a child, my favorite holiday in Kostur was Easter. That’s when my grandmother Dora and my mother Vana dressed me in my native Macedonian folk outfit which they had made for me to wear on special occasions. It was wonderful to ‘click’ eggs with my friends and then eat them after six weeks of fasting. I particularly liked the candles made especially for children in the form of small baskets that were easy to hold. Yes, Easter was an endless happy time of the year for celebrating a new beginning, hope and praise for life. People rejoiced, congratulated each other, fell in love and respected one another on Easter... Oh, my good friend how can I tell you this... If Macedonian Culture dies in Kostur we will all die with it... The secret is hidden in our Macedonian birthright... it is hidden deep inside of us. We never took an oath to shield our ancestral land and protect this country... It is only by our deep roots that our identity is confirmed...

The Macedonian people's fate is threatened, not only in Kostur, it is a historic crossing; it involves all Macedonians from this part of Macedonia..."

It was hard for me to believe everything this old man was telling me. I stood there mute, frozen and visibly upset.

We took a walk down the sloping sidewalks. They were a bit slippery from the half rounded beautiful pebbles in the gravel with which the sidewalks were covered. The sun was setting and the pebbles, in a strange way, were reflecting all the colours of the rainbow. It gave a person a strong sensation that they were being splashed, especially near the lake and surrounding hills. One also got the sensation that the air was filled with music, poetry and all kinds of art.

The beauty of the lake came alive before our eyes. The houses looked like they were literally on top of one another looking down on us. And as darkness began to cover Kostur, looking up from the lakeshore, the city looked like a huge Christmas tree with thousands of shining lights all mirrored in the gilded lake. When the moon found its way to the top of Goritsa Peninsula, it looked like a huge lightbulb shining over the whitewashed and decorated houses shining on places of love and history in Kostur.

But now in these times there is rarely a time of true Macedonian life in Kostur. The only thing I know about Kostur and the Kostur gymnasium, churches and fisheries where the famous carp was caught, is what I learned from old man Krsto Krapov.

Many years have passed since I last saw Kostur. Even then the city was old and beautiful; it could not hide its beauty. Kostur is my personal big wound. It hurts me every time I think of the place where I was born and grew up. For me it has always been the most beautiful place in the world. But in the Balkans, as the veterans used to say: "Life is boring when there is no fighting..." and as such someone who has evil in their mind will surface and start looking for something, looking in history to justify his violent ways. The

fighting and the wars have divided us into heroes and evil doers and now, we find ourselves all around the world; not in our homeland, at our fathers' hearth. Why are we not in our homeland? And so I wonder: "Who am I? I was born here, I had a family and a house here, our ancestors are buried here and their bones have been destroyed here... Why? My God, my God, we have lost everything! What kind of people were we? What kind of people are we?"

I experienced a strange sensation which was making me feel inebriated. Light was pouring over the western part of the city just before sunrise. Windows were being opened and blinds were being pulled back. Warm air flowed out of the windows carrying the sweet breath of home and the aroma of grandma's frying pitulitsi (fritters).

I felt like a child being rocked to sleep in a cradle. I laughed out loud as if I was drunk.

I took a long breath of spring air filled with the sweet aroma emitted from the Macedonian homes. A magical feeling overwhelmed me and made me yell swear words out loud... The settlers, occupants and thieves of our homes gazed at me strangely from the windows. My heart began to tremble and I felt like I was going to pass out.

God! I am going to say it again: "I am so much in love with the home of my ancestors." Seeing it in ruins hurt me badly. My sight began to blur, I shivered and chills ran down my spine. The house was not too old, but was neglected. The garden was neglected. There were broken corners on all sides of the house and the yard was littered with bricks and garbage.

I whispered the names of all my dead relatives and wished them eternal rest.

God how many of my people were resting under such ruins...

So for years, every persecution, every attack on the Macedonian people, opened a new page, a new path on alien roads ruining more dreams and hopes. It is time for our people to wake up. Dig graves for our dead in our Macedonia. Wake up. Our dead are not

avenged... forgotten.... When are we all going to call out in a single voice what the world needs to hear?

Spring in Kostur began with the flooding of the River Belitsa. Half of April had already passed and the winter, which constantly wanted to come back, finally let go. That's when Krsto Krapov returned to his home, after half a century of being away. To him everything was like a dream.

Kostur, like every other place, had a life of its own.

The streets were empty, only my steps shattered my feeling that time had stopped.

The people of Kostur are now all over the world, more die of sorrow from roaming, left there by the left (communists) with nothing more than their tattered clothing on their backs. They do not die from hard work in factories, they die only because day and night they mourn the loss of the aroma of roses and basil found only in Kostur...

We were sitting on a wall while I listened to Krsto Krapov speak. He had a nice, warm voice but his face was rigid, tense and evil looking. Suddenly he looked down and a long uncomfortable pause followed. He looked like he was simmering with helpless rage. But some invisible force must have broken through because he looked at me and said:

“Oh, my friend, we Macedonians are silent, as if nothing bad had ever happened to us.

The Balkan war years 1912 and 1913 were years of pogrom, years of national disaster, especially for the people of Kostur, for us, and we remain silent in front of the world so that Greece can not only occupy our lands but also carry out unprecedented genocides against our people. Look at all the genocidal acts the Greeks have committed against us and the laws they have enacted to eliminate us. And where are the words ‘genocide’ or ‘occupation’ written in our most recent history? Nowhere! All we read in our history today is

that Macedonia was divided into three parts and its parts were annexed!! Really? Was this all that was done to Macedonia and nothing more? What about what was done to us, the Macedonian people? Is genocide an acceptable common practice not worthy of mention? Not even in our history books?

We remained silent and alive, listening to the great maple trees at the entrance of Kostur whispering in Godly voices, we watched the silky waves move across Lake Kostur always in motion and never sleeping...

Look here I will tell you how it was. I saw it with my own eyes. I saw it with the Greek Andartes and with our rebel fighters. It was all a setup... a skam... a lie. This is how it was done then: In the distant past someone killed someone from the Ilinden family. Then someone from his family murdered someone from the murderer's family. And so on and so on. Here in Kostur and in Kostur Region in general, every generation lost a few people to revenge killings. This is how it was done later: Thousands of people were detained and sent to the dry islands and many of those thousands left their bones on those islands? What had they done to deserve that? The only 'wrong' they had done was that they were Macedonians! Silence may indeed be golden in such situations but it seems to me that generation after generation of silence, protecting the evil done to us by the Greeks (Andartes), confirms that there was not a single Macedonian willing to step up and loudly say what he or she thinks: The true reasons why they have banished us is because we are Macedonians!!

After Macedonia was occupied, three types of patriotism surfaced and got into our Macedonian mix as we all, here in this part of Macedonia, bent our heads down and settled under our new Greek slavery. We left our Ottoman overlords with great hope that because the Greeks were Christians they would treat us better than the Ottoman Muslims... What a great surprise... I recall asking my grandparents; 'Why do we tolerate living under Greek slavery?' The answer: 'This is our homeland from time immemorial, there is nowhere else for us to go and this occupation too will pass just like the Ottoman occupation and the Greeks will leave just like the Ottomans left!'

The Greek occupation authorities justified this slavery by saying: ‘From time to time there needs to be cause for fear in those who can’t be helped with reason; and getting angry is not useful.’

One thing is certain, the Greeks committed crimes against us, especially against the descendents of the Ilinden fighters. The Ilinden rebels were freedom fighters and fought against Ottoman slavery and now in the 1940’s all those people and their families were labeled as fighters against Greek slavery.

Attacks against prominent Macedonian families have gradually increased with aims at robbing and degrading them of their honour. They used especially abusive words to describe them. When they went to their homes they would call out: ‘Get out of here you Ilinden dogs!’

We Macedonians here are characterized as having deep local patriotism. The village is an entity just like the family whose existence we jealously protect. This self-reliance and local loyalty is a natural consequence and a variable of our history. We carry a deep inborn sense of loyalty towards the spirit of Macedonia.

This Macedonian patriotism was put to the test in Kostur on March 5, 1943 when a meeting of 48 members from various villages was convened. There, among other things, they decided to form an organization called the “Macedonian Committee” for Kostur Region whose purpose was to defend the villages. People from about 60 different villages volunteered to join. They were even allowed to take up arms because they needed to protect themselves from dispossessed Greece.

Many gatherings like this one were also organized in other cities. All the descendants of Ilinden fighters got their chance to join the fight and many decided to grab arms and defend the Macedonian people against all past crimes committed against them. Many also felt that ‘the Macedonian days of slavery were over’.

Many Macedonians in those days became rebels and so ELAS wasted no time in labeling them ‘Fascists,’ ‘traitors,’ ‘Ohrana

agents' (Bulgarian agents) and whatever other denigrating words they could think of to discredit them. ELAS personnel then organized public rallies and gave many political speeches, brainwashing the people. They also beat up people and broke into shops and houses. The rebels had no choice but to call on the people to stand up and defend themselves. They shouted: 'Brothers, let us unite! Brothers unite! Macedonian people when are you going to stand up for yourselves?! It is our primordial right to stand up and defend our fatherland, our hearth, our people and not just run away. God, we endured the Ottomans for five hundred years and now we have to endure the Prosfigi (Asia Minor colonists and settlers) who are a hundred times worse. Oh Lord, you gave us a soul but there is no soul left in us, we are only people! How long must we spill our Macedonian blood!?' Later when the rebels saw that conditions were getting better, they slowed down and delayed their acts of justice. But in spite of their peaceful intentions, the Greek prison camps were being filled with the honest men from Kostur Region anyway...

The old people used to say, this can't be good, and not long after that the rebels armed themselves with long Italian rifles (Maliheri) and stopped the Greeks from ransacking the villages and from abducting people. It was not difficult to drive the Greeks out. The rebels captured a couple of culprits and drove their long swords through their chests. That was it. Doing this, however, created so much fear that it not only drove the Greeks out but also stopped all criminal activities. Those who had ideas about robbing and murdering people and about snatching a woman or a girl, would not dare... And as such, the rebels brought some happiness into the lives of the villagers. Unfortunately, as things progressed, life in the villages became cursed, especially when people began to be drawn to fight in a life or death struggle. After that life reverted back to the way it was and the villagers had to hide and do their singing and dancing indoors in secret rooms.

There was talk that the Prosfigi envied our songs and dances. They would say that it was envy for those songs and dances that motivated them to want to create a large army so that they could chase us away and keep all of Macedonia's treasures for themselves.

But try to explain that to the Macedonians who were accustomed to dividing themselves into two camps and who hated each other... It is impossible. The communists had no problem promising everyone a bright future, except for themselves. What did they really think; that in all that chaos they would come out on top? Did they really think they were that smart?

And while they divided themselves into two groups they forgot that they were Macedonians and became 'communists' and 'rebels'. So in time the rebels hated the communists as if they were Greek Andartes and the communists hated the rebels as if they were fascists. The only difference was that the rebels remained true believers to the end and stayed home and defended their fatherland... The communists, on the other hand, fled and joined Tito's army... to do what... I don't know...

When my grandfather found out that some Macedonian communists had become 'brothers' of the Greek communists, he made reference to a proverb: 'Our peoples, the boys who call themselves communists, have no idea that one cannot place themselves in the same bag with a savage dog.'

They say that disaster never comes alone. And it is the way they say it is. Misery needs company. Misery follows misery. Harm follows harm. Evil begets evil... for the Macedonians.

After many Macedonians declared themselves Communists, the Greek government began to slander and persecute them saying that 'Communists are atheists', they are 'faithless', 'godless' and they belong in prisons. Now we Macedonians were hated on several levels, even by our own people. People were led to believe that those who were professing to be communists were very dangerous people and needed to be expelled and sent to live abroad. And that is exactly what happened to us. Now many people from Kostur Region, especially those who had ideological affiliations, ended up roaming the world. But, on the other hand, even during the Greek Civil War (1946 – 1949) the Macedonian people were pressured to

be atheists through the banning of our religion. You can see here how we were setup... Right?

Hatred was inherited and passed on from generation to generation, even today; even while we live in exile... we still hate each other like we were hungry for blood... for vengeance... for revenge. The blood that was spilled in those days created uncrossable boundaries between our families and between our people. No one could even marry a girl from an opposing family. This is something that never existed before but was now happening everywhere! This was even happening to the people of Kostur... who brought the evil here! Outsiders came here and brainwashed our people to hate one another. And to this date, no one has asked: 'Where did I go wrong?'"

I watched old man Krapov speak as images like shadows passed before my eyes. The lies, the suffering, the turmoil... our people have endured from the "invented" evil that has been unleashed upon us Macedonians, that made us to want to hate each other so much... and to never ask why?

"In the years after they divided Macedonia, the Macedonian people, it would seem, have learned to manipulate the power of speech by keeping silent...

Enough talk, we have a long way to go. We are going to visit the gravesite of Macedonians who hated each other..." and with those words old man Krapov stopped talking.

God, I said to myself, fate has squashed this man so many times and I can see now with my own eyes how much it has hurt him. He was in pain when he said:

"I am ashamed of covering up our history. By covering up our history we have hidden away our heroes, our victims... their sacrifices will be forgotten by the generations to come. And what do we do now? We celebrate the rewards of those who slaughtered our heroes. We celebrate their victories and festivities... They who came

here to destroy us! We stand in rows in front of their monuments, surrounded by the most beautiful and aromatic roses Kostur and Macedonia have to offer. And we did this for what? For some 'ideological' reason alien to us?! Shame on us!

Well, I am who I am. I am not two-faced. I tell it the way I see it. Everything has a price... History has a price... History will disregard the bones of the Macedonians who died for their freedom... Why? Because we chose to forget them by keeping silent!

They were the progeny of our Macedonia and all of us, I am telling you, will feel the pain of this open wound for as long as we live. Our silence is very strange indeed. We keep silent because we don't want to shame this old Greek civilization??? These savages??

More than a century ago we lost the key to our bright future and no one has thought of finding a cemetery to bury the bones, with dignity, of the Kostur rebels, Chakalarov's freedom fighters and those who died in the Greek Civil War; bones which have been scattered across occupied Macedonia!

Everywhere that we exist in the world we celebrate Ilinden. We celebrate Ilinden in the Republic of Macedonia. But for all the things we do outside, what do we do inside, in the Greek occupied part of Macedonia, especially for the children of occupied Macedonia? (Historically called Aegean Macedonia and its children - Egeitsi.) In our Kostur we keep silent. We were one people who all fought together in Ilinden, our joy and pride was the same, and now there (and everywhere else in Greek occupied Macedonia) we say nothing! We say nothing! Nobody says a word about the barbaric crimes that the Greeks have committed against us. No one says a word about what this unholy occupier has done and is still doing in our holy Macedonian fatherland. Why?!

The Ottomans ruled over us for more than 500 years but they did not destroy our Macedonian culture, they did not destroy our mother tongue, they did not even deny our names and the historic name of our country. As our heritage, Evlia Chelebi has left us traces of our past, our civilization and our deep roots. He researched (not destroyed) and wrote about our economic, social, cultural and

political characteristics. He also wrote about our language and our dialects. He was a ‘godsend’ and a friend to us Macedonians. Now let me ask you this: ‘Can we say the same thing about anyone who exists today? Are there no intelligent Greeks out there who can do this?’ Outside of genocidal acts perpetrated against us, what have our current occupiers done for us lately?”

Old man Krapov looked like he was on fire. He stared at me sharply for a moment. I thought he wanted something from me. But it seems he was more focused on his own thoughts than on me. He continued to speak and finally he said that the main problem with telling his story about the rebels freeing Kostur was that it was going to take too long, so now he had some new ideas.

He said: “I, Krsto Krapov, call on you to please help me save our Kostur culture from oblivion and collect the bones of our ancestors. I am sure the people of Kostur, with all their love, want to talk but just don’t have the courage because they are afraid! This is their tragedy!”

Old man Krapov raised his head up high, looking proud and bold, and said: “I kept silent myself, I did not condemn them for keeping silent and neither did I warn them that we would be lost because of our fear and ignorance.”

He then raised his voice and shouted at me: “HEY MACEDONIAN! OUR ANCESTORS WERE ALSO LIKE THAT, SILENT!”

He looked away as if addressing the world and shouted: “WE LOVE KOSTUR BECAUSE IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN OURS! AND THAT CLAIM IS SUPPORTED BY HISTORIC FACTS!”

He began talking again in his normal voice and loudness: “Here is what a Grkoman (Greekophile) and close associate of Pavlos Melas said about Ioannis Dragoumis and what he wrote to the Greek government in 1903.

Ioannis Dragoumis, in February 1903, wrote the following to the Greek government: ‘Most Macedonians will rebel. They are not interested in Hellenism. We will remain a minority in a naked open

space. These poor (Macedonian) people don't want Bulgaria or Greece, they only want one thing; their freedom, that is why they are not struggling to make Macedonia Bulgarian, they just want to make it an autonomous Macedonian state. Meaning, Macedonia for the Macedonians.' (Ilinden Notebook: From the diary of Ioannis Dragoumis - page 19, Petsiva Publishing, 2000.)”

Old man Krapov looked at me with pride and, in a compassionate tone of voice, said: “I feel very old, like my life is nearing its end but I would love to see Macedonia and the people of Kostur become happy, just like our Ilinden grandfathers wanted us to be!”

I know what Kostur was like back in 1941 to 1944 when I went there to visit the gymnasium where my grandfather Doro and my grandmother Ianka were taught. Today everything is different. Today the walls of the churches are collapsing and the icons of our saints are burned in Kostur and in the Kostur Region villages. Each of us should, at least once, ask ourselves the question: “What have we changed in our lives?” If we were given the opportunity to go back to our past, a past which was framed on lies; if we could start from scratch, what errors would we try to fix? Which pain, what remorse, what sadness would we choose to delete?

Would we dare give new meaning to life away from this city, away from our birthplace?

Would we dare guess what would become of us in exile?

Where would we go and with whom?

No one wants wanderers, losers, people who do not know how to defend what is theirs... Even animals will not leave their home so easily...

The view of eternal Kostur is wonderful.

Chapter three – Cries from unbearable pain after being stabbed by the dagger of the “Andarts”

1. One hot August morning Husni Hussein - Pasha received two Beg (Ottoman official) brothers named Dervis Beg and Selim Beg, sons of the almighty Kasim Beg well respected in Kostur by Ali - Pasha from Ianinna. During a cordial but informal conversation Hussein Pasha said:

“You know that Apostle Paul passed through here and wrote a letter to the people of Corinth, in which he said: ‘I am nothing without love’. It was an interesting thought expressed through these words, don’t you think? Apostle Paul did not stay long while passing through Macedonia because here he found true believers, and so he continued his mission to see if the seeds of Christianity could find fertile soil further away from Solun. Historical facts have shown that things did not go well in Hellas where polytheism was dominant even five centuries after St. Paul’s mission. But that was not his most essential work. It seems that the message ‘I am nothing without love’ did not take root in Hellas where the apostle threw more seeds.”

Husni Hussein Pasha was well liked by the people of Kostur, especially by the fishermen. He was very fond of and often listened to the lovely stories they told. He was well respected and addressed the people of Kostur in their own dialect of the Macedonian language: “My good people what can I do for you today? I know times are tough but, when we are able, we are obligated to help families, friends and neighbours. You must follow the goodness of your ancestors. This is how we have lived together for centuries.”

He was remembered as a man who had much understanding of the people’s problems and never banned the Macedonian language. In fact he made an effort to learn to speak Macedonian so that he could communicate with the ordinary people.

Apart from being merciful, Hussein Pasha was also remembered for building a hotel in which the Sarai Caravan travelers lodged. Those traveling from Epirus, from the city Ianinna to Tsari Grad (Istanbul), had a place to stay. Long columns of people and horses often left

this place for the long road to Solun. Sometime the columns were so long they stretched from Kostur to the Klisura Pass. For centuries they followed the trail of their ancestors. It was a long and dangerous journey, during which many people were killed during robberies. That's the way it was. Some among the travelers were rich and spent their money (Turkish liras) here in Kostur. Others left some of the goods they were carrying. The Caravan was good for Kostur's economy.

Beside the hotel there was a bath house. The walls of which are still visible along with the smooth stones that were used to build it. The stones were cut by specialist stone cutters. The corners were so precise that they looked like they were cast in molds. Now the gates have fallen down and a large building has been erected next to the old bath house in which a Pontian colonist has built an overnight lodge and a restaurant. In front of the building there is a wide veranda with a magnificent panoramic view of Kostur's nature.

One day Husni Hussein Pasha invited a number of high ranking officers to his place for a formal dinner to celebrate the suppression of the Ilinden Uprising. While they were having a discussion, Hussein Pasha suddenly raised his hand and everyone stopped talking. Because he loved drinking coffee he wanted to tell the officers something over coffee.

"Friends," Hussein Pasha said, "You have heard of Karavangelis, the Kostur Metropolitan, right? Karavangelis may know how to properly wear the robes but that does not mean that he loves God. It does not mean he can be a good envoy of his country. Karavangelis has shown himself to be the opposite. In fact I believe he has teamed up with the devil.

During my Military Academy days after I learned how to handle a sword, I beat my teacher at a sword fight. He became enraged and threw the sword away and began to cry. I walked away out of respect for him. But what I really wanted to tell you about was the anger and hatred of the Southern Christians, particularly that of Bishop Germanos Karavangelis, the Bishop of Kostur, towards the

Macedonians. The people of Kostur when they saw the Black Angel, excuse me I meant to say Karavangelis, they walked away from him because he is the man who opened the gates of HELL for the Macedonians.

I want to explain myself here because in our Turkish language ‘Kara’ means ‘Black’ and ‘Karavangelis’ means ‘Black Vangelis’. He may be someone from our seed, but it is better to prove that he is not... This man is more than a black devil, he is full of malice.

You all know that on July 20, 1903 (August 2, 1903 by the new calendar) the Macedonian people all throughout Kostur Region declared the Ilinden Uprising. The moment the people of Kostur woke up they saw the mountains all around them turn black. The place looked like an ant colony crawling with rebels but we won and now we get to celebrate our victory. But let me say this, that all these rebels were honest children of Macedonia. I do not know whether you know this or not but several decades ago, I think it was since 1875, a Macedonian gymnasium operated in Kostur which was run by the brave rebel commander Lazo Pop - Traikov.

They were no bother for the Turkish government. Quite the opposite, we would have been happy to have more educated people. It was only reasonable, right? Even the celebrated Ata Turk belonged to the tormented Macedonian nation.

After Karavangelis arrived as Bishop of Kostur, he visited me many times and begged me to close down the Gymnasium because, he would say, it was a nest for rebels. But I told him a hundred times, we can't do that and risk embracing the Turkish government in front of Europe. It would be an uncivilized act. He would then leave dissatisfied and angry with his face looking like that of a hungry beast.

One day he said: ‘We will open the Gymnasium in Greek...’

I broke out laughing and said: ‘Bishop, Bishop... Who will you teach Greek here when no one in Kostur is Greek?!

He got angry and his face became distorted. He then picked up his robe and hat and left. He didn't even drink the coffee I served him. I thought to myself; What kind of priest is this Karavangelis?...

After our victory over the Ilinden revolutionaries, he used our anger against the rebels. He personally broke into the Gymnasium and destroyed everything; the furniture, the desks, the maps, the library which contained books from all over the world; English, Russian, Turkish and old Byzantine images from the Exarchate Joseph. He did so much damage that the Gymnasium never recovered from it and since then has stopped operating.

I had distinguished guests visiting me that day and they insisted on coming with me to see what had happened. A large crowd had gathered in front of the Gymnasium.

I looked around the lobby and did not see much, but when we entered the library I said: 'What the hell has happened here?'

The bishop had tossed his tall hat and taken off his black robe, which made him look completely different. He now looked jovial and even heartfelt. Incoherent phrases were coming out of his mouth like angry snakes.

I was all shaken up. He looked less like a holy man and more like someone from Greece from the secret services.

In my confusion I asked: 'Is that you Bishop?'

Before I saw him or he saw me, I thought about his cold heart when I witnessed how he had ripped a picture of the Exarchate Joseph and how he had ripped the Holy book written with Cyrillic letters into small pieces. This was the second time I saw the man cry and the funny thing about this man was that he was a priest. I know that tears are craving for tenderness, but not in this corrupt and dirty priest. In him there was no tenderness; only anger! I thought to myself perhaps the bishop was crying for my benefit, trying to arouse me, or perhaps he wanted to alleviate his problems or wanted me to take responsibility for his problems that he himself could not handle. But I was convinced that it was delayed crying.

I was astonished by the hatred in his voice and in his words when he shouted: ‘These people must go, disappear from the face of the earth! This language and Cyrillic alphabet irritate my soul, I cannot stand them, I will explode...!’

I became impatient with him and said: ‘No, Bishop! You very well know that he who is against the Cyrillic alphabet is against civilization and all that is self-serving and offensive. We have been here for five centuries and have never even thought of doing something so cruel.

It looks like your fanaticism had blinded you and you cannot understand the Macedonians, especially the people of Kostur who possess indescribable power and a strong sense of belonging! You cannot do that which you are thinking.’

He looked at me. His face was without expression like his black frock. His breathing was rapid and he swallowed hard. He clenched and twisted his teeth. His eyes were dilated and bloodshot.

I asked him: ‘So, why does it bother you so much? Are you not one of Christ’s children!?’

He answered me with eyes full of vengeful tears: ‘I have a job to do!’ he said, ‘I am here to prevent new situations from taking place!’

I then said: ‘Bishop, it is hard to understand you. For many years priests and bishops did everything they could to help their people and you in an instant have destroyed all that...’

One of my agents said to me: ‘This person is truly mad! He is in a foreign country under our rule and does what he feels like! Is he that ignorant not to understand that Macedonia is under Ottoman rule?! And who knows what else he does!’

My agent looked at me and said: ‘Commander Sir! You know what made this priest mad!? He is not a child of God! He is more dangerous than the devil! He wants to create trouble for these peaceful Christian people who have an Orthodox Church, which

belongs to the Exarchate family and is full of their saints. But this Karavangelis character wants to push them to join the Hellenic Church. But such a church does not exist here. So, to make the churches Hellenic he decided to replace the saints. Is that not anti-Christian?

For a while now he has been spreading his madness and anger and agitating the South Christians. He tells the people of Kostur that they are Greeks from the time of Alexander the Great but the Slavs who passed by here made them into Slavs. He tells them that their appearance is Greek and that the soil they walk on is Greek. He tells them that memories hidden in the soil can testify to that. And those memories are Greek and can be found in the ancient Greek coins. The writing on the coins is Greek.

Look at him! He is holding the thick book in his hands and tearing it apart. That book has pictures of the Macedonian saints. These saints are the Soldiers of Christ and sons of Macedonia. Here, look at the names: St. Angel Lerinski. St. Jakov Kosturski, St. Dionisi Kosturski, St. Giorgi Kosturski. And here is Zlata Meglenska, St. Nikita Serski and many other Macedonian saints. They served their people here under the most difficult conditions. This is the truth. The rest is invented lies!

He came here some time ago and started to undermine the feelings of the poor people. He propagated his lies by giving them gold if they declared themselves Greek. It is happening even today. Look at the windows and balconies. Those who sold their identity for gold are now flying Greek flags. By doing so, this crazy priest has violated Ottoman law!?' This is enough reason to have this mad man expelled, right?' concluded my agent.

In our company, beside my agent who spoke, stood Bei Demirpeiko who had come all the way from Iannina to visit with Bei Hussein. Encouraged by the words of my agent, Demirpeiko said: 'Your agent is right. This man – priest, whom I have been watching for a while now, according to some of the people of Kostur that I have spoken with, is not a Christian. He is wearing the shadow of greed and is abusing our hospitality.

I am familiar with the Christians who live in this region. My great grandmother Sevda, wife to my great-grandfather Ali - Pasha from Iannina, was from this region, from the Vicho mountain villages. She was a very beautiful woman. My great grandfather kidnapped her and had three sons with her. One of those sons was my father, Bei Galipeio. We called her Baba Sevda. Baba Sevda raised me. Because of the great respect I have for her I cannot allow this crazy priest to do this against these people.

This devil priest does not deserve to carry the rod with the silver chain used by Macedonian saints, martyrs and deserving priests who were born and lived in Kostur and spread and taught the Christian Faith. This devil is destroying everything and replacing it with his own chosen material, which begins anew with him. Observe! He destroyed the thick book written in Macedonian entitled “Autobiographical notes on the Macedonian saints - and all soldiers of Christ and sons of Macedonia”, in which there is information about the lives of those great figures who were here during the worst conditions and were tortured and oppressed, imprisoned, enslaved, crucified, beheaded, bodies cut to pieces, skinned, etc., while being forced to give up Christ and their homeland. But they remained faithful to Christ and to their Macedonia to the end.

My beloved and well-respected Baba Sevda told me a great deal about this. One time she said: “We Macedonians are very patient people, but that does not mean that we are willing to give up our Holy Church and our saints...” Often she would say that the Macedonian people did not experience true evil from the Ottoman government... But they now do with this devil Karavangelis who is bent on destroying these people with bribes and lies...’ concluded Bei Demirpeiko.

I then turned to Karavangelis and said: “Oh Father, Father, I don’t know how you can call yourself a ‘child of God’? How you can eat the bread from these people when all you do is commit crimes and evil against them? And you came here all the way from hell to preach the Christian faith?!

I can count on my fingers the number of most inhuman crimes that you have committed against the Macedonian people, whose future generations will never forget:

You paid assassins to bring you the head cut off Lazo Pop – Traikov (3), Director of this Gymnasium here in Kostur.

You welcomed Kote the executioner with words that are improper for a Christian who represents himself as a child of God, to use. In God's name you play dirty games against the Macedonian people. You told Kote: 'Now my obligations and concerns have eased.' Lazo Pop – Traikov was a driving force behind the freedom fighters here. Now he will not write any more poems or teach any of the freedom fighting children.

I believe that future Macedonian generations will admire Lazo Pop – Traikov and will sing and read poetry about him and his deeds like the following:

'Why do you cry, why do you mourn, you tall Lisets Mountain, why are you covered in fog from top to bottom?

I will cry and I will mourn, for many centuries, because look where they slaughtered Lazo Pop – Traikov.

They cut off his proud head for fifty liras (Turkish gold coins) and took it to Kostur, a gift for the despot Karavangelis.'

It will be shameful, very shameful, to speak about that despot who paid the beast Kote to behead Lazo.

Let us all say: 'May God forgive Lazo Pop – Traikov's sins and save his soul!

He was the first and greatest commander and poet in Kostur of our time!'

Bei Demirpeiko stood there looking furious, tightly holding the handle of the sword hanging from his waist with his right hand. The moment Husni Hussein - Pasha finished talking, in a raised voice he said:

“It is shameful for a bishop, given that he is a guest of the Ottoman authorities, to be hanging the head of a dead person at the door of an Ottoman government building in Kostur and leaving it there to rot until the last days of October.”

Bei Demirpeiko then turned to Karavangelis and said: “I would like to ask you a question. Do you believe in the Christian faith and justice or is there a dark executioner hiding under that black robe. This kind of behaviour belongs to the so-called psychopaths and sociopaths, and not to God’s children.”

While thinking of the head hanging in the dry October wind and, without any particular expression of heroism and virtue, suffering, or fear of death, Bei Demirpeiko said: “The Macedonian people have experienced enough dark trials from this crazy priest through his tortures, violence and decapitations. He is responsible for the demise of many Macedonian leaders. Our empire should not tolerate foreigners with such wild and revolting practices!”

Demirpeiko then, but only for a moment, stared at the people walking by outside the window, momentarily stopping, startled by his piercing gaze. Red faced and hair standing up at the back of his neck, he turned to Karavangelis, angrily looked at him and said:

“Shame on you! You also organized and butchered entire villages. Only an evil man would do that! Here is what the representative of the Russian Embassy in Bitola said about one of your abhorrent and inhumane acts of slaughter, carried out by your henchmen at the village Zagorichani:

‘Oh my God! There is no pen to write with to describe the horrors and atrocities committed against these people by those beasts armed from head to toe. They committed unheard of horrors never before seen in this world and in the history of mankind.’

Then we find the following written by a newspaper on the slaughter in the village Zagorichani: ‘On March 25, 1905, during the so-called Greek Struggle for Macedonia, 200 paid soldiers led by the Greek officers headquarters were dispatched to destroy the village Zagorichani where the soldiers committed one of the most heinous acts known to mankind. They killed more than fifty innocent villagers (among them old men, women and children) and burned all the houses and barns that were still standing after the Ilinden uprising. These savage soldiers fled only after the village was approached by the Ottoman regular army. The Zagorichani massacre cast fear and terrible nightmares all over Europe,’ the newspaper wrote,” concluded Bei Demirpeiko.

Demirpeiko then paused for a moment, took a deep breath and continued talking to Karavangelis: “And what do you say to the horrors committed in Zelenich!? ...The bloody wedding in the village Zelenich?! Should I continue?”

Bei Demirpeiko looked up, raised his hands and said: “My God, how can this Empire, our Empire allow this to happen, allow this person to commit such heinous acts before our eyes, an evil person who disguises himself as a man of God and as the bishop of Kostur?”

The concept of “one church” is a reflection of its name “Church of Greece”, also known as the “Greek Orthodox Church”. The name is a western mold and is associated with only one church. The autonomy of this church was recognized by Constantinople in 1850, 20 years after Greece became independent. The Church of Greece belongs to “Old Greece”, which does not include Macedonia or Crete which are still under the authority of the patriarch in Constantinople.

Bei Demirpeiko then turned towards Hussein – Pasha and said: “God help us all! It is now clear to me but I will explode from frustration, why would you, Honourable Husni Hussein – Pasha allow this to happen?” He then turned towards Karavangelis and said: “After the entire world heard what you, Karavangelis, said when you were watching the village Zagorichani burnt like a torch, you went and celebrated. You celebrated March 25 as the greatest

attack against the believers of the Exarchate Church! You then, when you were talking about the great ‘Andart evil’, said:

‘I deliberately visited Zagorichani while it was burning and rejoiced, feeling like a second Nero.’...”

Demirpeiko paused for a moment, looked at Karavangelis, and said: “I don’t know from what hell God brought you here, but when these gentle people, the true children of God, and all other Christians in the world, find out that you, a priest and bishop no less, rejoiced at the killings of simple ordinary Christian peasants - Macedonian people, for simply praying at their Exarchate Church, what will they think of you?!”

Demirpeiko then turned to the others and, while pointing at Karavangelis, said: “Look at him, he committed all these criminal acts and he is still happy...”

Demirpeiko then turned to Karavangelis and said: “You, Bishop Karavangelis, you must realize that Kostur is not Greece, it belongs to the Ottoman Empire, and you must cease your criminal acts and stop behaving like a spoiled child in a candy store! Do you understand?”

The crafty bishop looked at him sideways and immediately jumped out of the place where he was standing, put his black robe on and, with open arms raised up in the air, said:

“You spoke well Bei Demirpeiko but put aside your concerns and kindness. You know very well who those freedom fighters are. They are those people who want to kick you Ottomans out. They are the ones who refuse to accept the Greek Church and want Macedonia for the Macedonians.”

At this point I (Husni Hussein – Pasha), interjected and said: “I am standing here listening to all of you and I can’t believe what I am hearing! My agents and Bei Demirpeiko are upset and I can’t understand why this priest is so angry at the Macedonians and where his negativity is coming from? It seems to me that this bishop has been angry for a long time and was in need of a cathartic discharge.

He has been charged with mixed emotions and was waiting for some time to perform such a catharsis, to purify his soul and to achieve spiritual and psychological fulfillment and emotional discharge. His nerves could not sustain honest stress as he lives in a state of panic. After the Macedonians failed to liberate themselves during the Ilinden Uprising, he took it upon himself to believe that this was the end of Macedonia.”

I then stood up and proudly said: “I have been with these people for many years, especially with the people of Kostur, and I can assure you that the Macedonians, in addition to their history and culture, which are fundamental aspects of their regular life, have their own Macedonian identity and are fighting to preserve it. And we respect that!

On the other hand, I am equally certain that this bishop is a man who loves no one, not even himself. He is strangled by the mistakes of his own life. He has yet to truly begin to live. I also believe that he is a man who will never find peace in his soul and even God cannot help him...”

After hearing me out, Karavangelis composed himself, turned and, while looking at me with the protruding eyes of an executioner, soberly said:

“Lord Husni Hussein – Pasha, you have power, I don’t doubt that, but I do believe these books here have even greater power, magical power and you can’t just leave them here.”

The bishop stood there in front of the Pasha looking shaken and disappointed that he had not destroyed the book “Macedonian Military Training and Doctrine” written by Gotse Delchev and Gorche Petrov. That particular book was written in 1900 and had authentic information about military training and rules of engagement for the Macedonian military units. The book also had guidelines for teaching the Macedonian people basic revolutionary tactics and how they should be implemented.

I (Husni Hussein – Pasha) then turned to Karavangelis and said: “Bishop, what you are doing is evil and criminal. You are not only

violating Christian laws but you are also violating human rights laws, unfortunately you cannot see the criminality of your actions, even now that they have been made clear to you. Stupidity is the most uncommon of all diseases, but I never thought it could be caught by a preacher of the faith...

You have lost your true Christian ways and you have turned the weak into servants of the strong. But let me tell you that we the Ottomans are in power in Macedonia, and not you the Greeks. You have a great desire for Macedonia to become Greek very soon but that has not happened. We are responsible for Macedonia and have to answer to the international community and to the civilized world about the Macedonian people and not you. You should also know that we consider your 'Andartes' as nothing more than a bunch of dangerous gangs who skillfully use and abuse our leniency."

I then turned to the others and said: "Here is a man who appeared to us like a phenomenon in the early 20th century and who paid people to cut off the heads of prominent Macedonians, like the Commander and Professor Lazar Pop - Traikov.

An especially powerful tool used by this bishop has been a combination of religion and politics. While he prayed and blessed his Andartes, he was a master of psychology and a demagogic orator when it came to controlling the masses. He was convinced that brains did not work with the masses, only emotions. In moments of weakness he used his skills to apply this age-old psychological technique in order to create hatred in the people against a common enemy, the Exarchate Church.

Karavangelis has lived a Christian life since he was very young but after he became Bishop of Kostur, he strayed from his true Christian faith. Perhaps this is why God, after listening to the long prayers of the Macedonian people, against whom he committed many heinous crimes, sent him a vision that it was time for him to not only leave Kostur but to also leave his earthly life, because he forgot that he belonged to God."

Chapter four – Painful memories - black chronicles

“Evildoers can never be revolutionaries, they will always be reactionaries.” (Vladimir Nobakov)

After the Balkan Wars (1912 - 1913) ended and the Bucharest Peace Treaty was signed on August 10, 1913, Macedonia and the Macedonian people were physically and politically divided between Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and later Albania which received Lower Prespa and Golo Brdo.

“There is only one truth,” said Krapov, “Greece, for the first time, officially set foot in the territory of Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia and in Kostur 100 years ago, when the Greek king signed a decree of occupation and not liberation. Occupation is conquest and possession of alien territory. Remember that! Then came decades of persecution and assimilation! Macedonians were prohibited from speaking their Macedonian language, punishable by law. It was an organized system of assimilation which worked very hard to erase the existence of our separate Macedonian entity.

Our old people used to say: ‘When the Greeks came here they brought dangerous nationalist laws with aims at uprooting our Macedonian roots, which they are still doing to this day. Since then many years of hard times have passed all full of lies, dirty propaganda, heroes and graves, persecution and missing generations - without youth’ ...”

Macedonia’s division and the problems the Macedonian people were experiencing from it were still very current when they were brought up to the Paris Conference on July 15, 1919, and addressed to the Commission for New Countries requesting that they find a solution. Under the then circumstances, the British were reluctant to do anything claiming that if they engaged themselves in the issues created by the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest, they would be facing many problems from which it would be difficult for them to withdraw. And thus the Macedonian problem was not even looked at, at the Paris Conference. Subsequent to that, the border problem was brought to the League of Nations, under Bulgarian pressure, many

times between 1925 and 1930, but it seems no one could offer an acceptable solution. This way the Macedonian problem was always avoided and so was the issue of redrawing borders in the Balkans.

The idea of granting autonomous rights to the Macedonians in the Serbian occupied part of Macedonia and to grant cultural rights to the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia was supported by the Italians and the British. Unfortunately France and Serbia opposed it and the idea was rejected.

Kostur chronicles – clarifying historical truths

I walked on the cobblestones of the green streets of Kostur for hours. I was moved by the beauty of nature and by the architecture of the city. I thought that the history of this place, my birthplace, was magical, enigmatic and unique.

I returned to the hotel and spent all night reading the history of the Balkan Wars. I became familiar with the tragic poverty of our spirit. Macedonia in the past resembled a theater in which people watched in silence these great national human dramas unfold. We the persecuted have lived here sunken in torment for half a century but have developed amnesia. We have forgotten how to learn about ourselves and about our past.

My recent return to a long lost war was like an open, fatal wound... I thought to myself: Will I find the courage to tell the truth?"

Just for a moment Krapov looked at me like he was feeling sorry for me and curiously asked: "I live over here... and you?"

"Me? I am a guest in this town where I was born and feel like an alien in my own country. I have permission to stay here for only several days. I have waited a lifetime for this while being at the mercy of the Greek government."

"It's a cruel fate... my friend!" replied Krapov as we hugged and parted ways...

For years we have been hiding behind the illusion of history, behind the semblance of humanity, behind the appearance of goodness, and all the while we stood in front of our executioners...

Ethnic cleansing in Greece – Round one:

Instead of respecting the rights of the Macedonian people, like it promised in all its agreements, Greece began to ethnically cleanse them. This was done through the following conventions;

A/ The Neuilly Convention, signed on November 27, 1919 called for “voluntary” exchanges of populations between Greece and Bulgaria. In 1920 Greece signed, before the League of Nations, a treaty obliging it to grant certain rights to the minorities of non-Greek origin in Greece. Four years later in 1924, at the suggestion of the League of Nations, Greece and Bulgaria signed the well-known Kalfov-Politis Protocol under which Bulgaria was obliged to grant the Greek minority in Bulgaria their minority rights (language, schools and other rights), while Greece, recognizing the Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia as a “Bulgarian” minority, was to grant them their minority rights.

But instead of doing what they were expected to do and what they had signed, both Greece and Bulgaria went on expelling Macedonians from the Macedonian territories they had occupied in 1912, 1913. Greek authorities continued to expel the Macedonian population well into the mid 1920's.

B/ Then came the Lausanne Peace Treaty signed in 1923 which called for the compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey.

Right after World War I, Greece began to implement its expansionist policies and initiated a campaign of conquest in Asia Minor, which later became known as the Turkish - Greek War (1919-1922). This turned out to be a disaster for Greece and the last time it attempted to implement its ambitious “Megale Idea” to create a Greater Greece.

After its expansionist ambitions were curbed by the crashing defeat it received from Turkey, Greece began to look inward in order to purify itself from the inside. Being built on a shaky foundation under the claim that everyone in Greece was Greek and Greece only occupied historically Greek lands, Greece did not want to harbour “nonconformists” on its territory and made sure that they were gone one way or another. But it had to do it “legally” and thus we have the various Agreements mentioned earlier. Legal or illegal, however, it made no difference to those being targeted. For them these agreements proved to be catastrophic and caused unprecedented consequences bordering on genocide, especially for the Macedonian people. During its last fiasco with Turkey, Greece expelled some 70-80 thousand more Macedonians and in their place, just in Macedonia, it settled 560,000 Turkish Christian colonists from Asia Minor.

One of the ploys Greece used to convince the world that it was okay for it to exchange populations with other countries, was the claim that these people were not only non-Greeks but they also did not belong there because they had “illegally invaded” historical Greek territories over time. And thus, the indigenous Macedonians who lived on those lands for millennia, over night became “Slavo-Macedonians”. Greece, at the time, never made any claims that “other” Macedonians lived in Macedonia so the “Slavo” label was in fact a superfluous label which served to marginalize the Macedonians and label them as “outsiders” on their own lands! After tearing up a big portion of Macedonia for itself (1913-1919) and ethnically cleansing its population from 1920 to 1940, Greece had to ensure that things remained smooth inside and that if anything did happen, then it would have to have explicit rules and modalities for political intervention.

It is worthwhile at this point to mention that, much later, Greece did use the label “Slavo” to make a distinction between the indigenous (Endopii) Macedonians and the Turkish Christian colonists (Ponti, Prosigni) it brought to Macedonia from Asia Minor. After many years of denying that Macedonians ever existed and after it became obvious to Greece that the Republic of Macedonia was about to declare its independence from Yugoslavia, Greece did a reversal on the “Macedonian issue” and declared that “everyone” in its part of

Macedonia was now Macedonian, except in the reverse order. While the real Macedonians remained “Slavo-Macedonians”, the Turkish Christian colonists from Asia Minor became “Macedonians” without a label. They now were considered to be legitimate Macedonians who were exclusively entitled to the entire Macedonian heritage!

This was the Greek government’s first genocidal strategy venture: For the Macedonian people to lose their ethnic and historical status in the Greek occupied part of Macedonia.

In spite of everything evil that Greece did to the Macedonian people, it still entered the world as a multicultural country in the 20th century. In 1909 more than a third of the settlements in Old Greece (south of Mount Olympus, particularly the Peloponnesus) were non-Greek. Greece’s multiculturalism increased even more with its acquisition of “new territories” in 1913, a multiculturalism which Greece began to immediately suppress by population exchanges with Turkey and by renaming toponyms. The population exchanges with Turkey alone evicted 500,000 Macedonians Muslims out of Macedonia and brought 1.5 million Christian Turks into Greece. In 1923 the population in Greece increased from 5 to 6 million and the newly settled colonists and settlers from Turkey, known as “Madzhari”, “Prosfigi” or “Ponti”, made up about 25 percent of the total population. These population exchange agreements were carried out with the blessing of the Great Powers.

The Serbian kingdom did the same. It re-populated the Greek – Serbian border from Dojran to the tri-state border with non-Macedonian colonists. It intentionally created an artificial zone along the border so that Macedonians from one side could not have direct contact with Macedonians from the other side.

November 1926 - A dreary autumn in Kostur Region

Here is what the Greek government official gazette “Tis Efimeris Kiverniseos” no. 332 had to say on November 1st, 1926. A mandatory law has been passed calling for the replacement of all Macedonian names with Greek in all the settlements of the occupied part of Macedonia! Published in the same Gazette, no. 360 was a list of about 900 non-Greek city, town and village names along with

their Greek replacements. And this is how Greece and the Greeks were created!

Facts and arguments regarding Greek strategies in dealing with the Macedonians – as told by Greek history; the history of the victors!

Confucius says: “You can’t make joint plans with people who aspire to other goals...”

The Greek strategy was to acquire a Macedonia without Macedonians. They came to Kostur and to Aegean Macedonia with one goal in mind; to persecute the Macedonians until they all disappeared!

A1. Athens, May 2, 1906. File K 59 V, GAK

In investigating living space in the Greek state, necessary for economic and national survival, the first step of the Athens government was to look at the Macedonian territory, but not at its population. In this regard, a representative of the Greek “Macedonian Committee”, who was supporting the “Macedonian conflict”, arrived in Athens from Macedonia in 1905 with a delegation and complained (to the representatives of the Macedonian Committee in Athens) about the horrific and terrifying acts the Greek Andartes perpetrated in Bitola and Lerin Regions. The Committee’s reply was: “We (Greeks) do not need the Macedonians (people) but we have a great need for Macedonia (its lands). (Karavitis, 1994, 937)

MY NOTE: These were the first deadly thoughts against us Macedonians. No one in the world, to this day, has even seen or remembers the existence of a ruthless invader that has threatened the existence of a nation as Greece has with the Macedonians!

A2. A great deal of effort has been given to the study of the Macedonian conflict from 1904 to 1908 because of its importance to Greek history.

The city Kostur was the first place in the region where the liberation struggle for the conquest of Macedonia (1904-1908) began. The first

actions were against the Bulgarian bands and were organized in Kostur by Pavlos Melas.

Melas's obituary reads: "He died heroically on October 18, 1904 in the village Statitsa in Kostur Region. His last words were: 'No Bulgarian should be left alive!' ..."

NOTE: Unlike Karavitas, who said: "We don't need the Macedonians, we need Macedonia..."

A3. The Metaxas dictatorship: cruelest attack on the Macedonian language

The Metaxas dictatorship focused on "solving" its internal problems by using the harshest methods it could find in order to assimilate the Macedonian population in the Greek fold. Harsh methods were used against the population living at Greece's northern frontiers. Many villagers from those regions were forced to move deeper into Greece in order to avoid contact with the outside world, particularly with Macedonians living in the Serbian, Bulgarian and Albanian occupied parts of Macedonia. In a separate government order the dictatorship placed a ban on the Macedonian language, making it illegal to be spoken, even in private. Those caught speaking Macedonian faced steep fines and jail time. A large part of the population faced many fines and jail time because people simply did not know how to speak any other language except for Macedonian. In other words they were found guilty because they did not speak Greek, not because they did not want to, but because they did not know the Greek language. Many spent time in the Greek dry islands being tormented, humiliated and abused on a daily basis.

Summer in Kostur Region - August 4, 1936

The Metaxas dictatorship came to power in Greece on August 4, 1936. During that time the Greek fascist regime declared that it would transform Greece into a "third civilization". It began by banning all political parties and organizations and all political activities in the country. It dissolved parliament and passed a "special measures act against communism". It also labeled Macedonians as

“dangerous communists”.

In 1937 the fascist regime organized a new detention camp for the communists in Akronaphlia near the city Naphplion. This was an old provincial town from the middle ages built on a huge rock beside the sea near Naphplion in the Peloponnesus. They named it “Stratopedon singendroseos komouniston, Naphplion-Akronaphlia”.

Winter in Kostur Region - December 1940

Krapov said: “My brother Naum, may he rest in peace, who died as a freedom fighter, told me a few things. One dreary morning in 1938, Italy occupied Albania and threatened Greece with war. In the fall of 1939, the Greek government began mass mobilizations and stationed troops on the Albanian border. That’s when it formed Division IX and filled it with Macedonian soldiers from Kostur and Lerin Regions. When the soldiers arrived at the top of Mounts Mali-Madi and Verba it was already late fall. It was a beautiful autumn afternoon and the sky above was clear and blue, as my brother remembered it.

Now, in addition to calling out the slogan ‘It is honourable to die for the motherland Hellas!’, being under the command of several Greek officers, being wounded by Turkish bullets in the Greek-Turkish war in Asia Minor, fighting in the name of an occupying king, being forced to work on road crews and building various fortifications, the Macedonian soldiers and the local Macedonian Kostur population, young and old, were forced to go to night school to learn the Greek language.

One day Nikos Papadopoulos, the National Brigade Commander, climbed on top of his jeep and gave a speech to the First Battalion, which surprised everyone. In his speech he said: ‘You Macedonians are great patriots and have courage to fight against the enemy and to protect your families. Metaxas (4) acted improperly when he banned your mother tongue.’ He said this with a disgusted, icy, harsh and serious look on his face.

The next person to give a speech after Papadopoulos was Boulikas. Excited and jumpy he said: 'In 1921 in Asia Minor, during the Greek-Turkish War, I fought in the front lines exclusively with Macedonians. They fought bravely and heroically and gave their lives for the motherland Hellas and for the King of Hellas. We need the same courage from them today to fight against the Italian occupation'. After that Boulikas cried out loud: 'Forward Macedonians! Forward brothers! Hooray!' And such was the fate of the Macedonian people occupied by the Greeks who died by the thousands on the battlegrounds during the Greek-Turkish and during the Greek-Italian Wars, not to mention those who died in the Greek prisons on the dry islands and during the Greek Civil War and who were buried in mass graves. When they needed us they called us 'brothers', 'comrades' and acknowledged our bravery but what are they saying now, after a century of silence!?

But what do the suffering Macedonian mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, who lost loved ones and have found themselves living far away from their birthplace, say?

They say: 'We sometimes hear voices in the night. They are the voices of our sons and brothers who left their bones at the fronts. They are calling for us from the front lines in Asia Minor, from the fronts from Elbasan to Korcha on Mount Tepeleni, from the fronts of Gramos and Vicho! They are crying because they have not been buried properly; because they gave their lives not for Macedonia but for the interest of those who today occupy us and have taken everything from us. They died for those who today deny our rights, our existence, our country, our nation, our name, our language... They died for those who persecute us and have exiled us from our homes and birthplace...' The Greeks were not satisfied to have received 51% of Macedonia in 1913; they wanted everything and committed great atrocities to get it. Now they refuse to acknowledge what they have done because, according to them, we don't exist! They butchered our people and drove our families apart all around the world! They took our properties and refuse to allow us to return to our homes, claiming that we don't belong there because we are not Greeks by birth. They destroyed our habitats, changed the names of our toponyms and personal names and all this was done in front

of Europe. And thus Europe and the rest of the world are well aware of the Greek genocides committed against the Macedonian people!”

Krapov then stood up firmly on his feet and cried out: “Europe! There is no silence when there is horror!”

Krapov continued: “Many Macedonians who fought at the Albania front against the Italians were not allowed to return home after the Greek army’s defeat in February 1940. They were sent to the prison camps in Akronaphlia.

Life flowed the way the Greeks wanted it to flow. They did not care about the cries of the Macedonian mothers for their children, the dead or the living interned in prisons all throughout Macedonia. Thousands of children were left without their fathers and earners of their bread. Children were left to beg for their food and as they gathered at the churches, the Greek priests prayed to the Lord for their salvation: ‘Today is August 15, 1940, and as we celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin, the Great Mother, let us all pray for our salvation, forever to live in angelic purity and virginity’.

On April 6, 1941 a number of German military forces began an operation against Yugoslavia and Greece. On April 8, several German mechanized units arrived in Solun. On April 9 Greek units began to capitulate and on April 21 German units occupied Athens. The Greek government had fled and was nowhere to be found. High ranking Greek officers tore off their military ranks and symbols from their uniforms and abandoned their posts, stealthily lurking among the Italian and German military.

Spring in Kostur Region - April 15, 1941.

The German army entered Kostur on April 15, 1941, stripped all Greek authority, removed all Greek institutions and declared them irrelevant. Not knowing what to expect from the new occupying regime, the people watched the Germans function efficiently and effectively. After a short time the German army showed itself to be competent and capable of giving orders without shouting, insulting

and humiliating people. They were clearly soldiers to the bone, capable of functioning in silence, resolved to do what was deemed most essential for themselves and giving a clear impression of what was possible and what was not. Execution of details was left to subordinates to carry out.

These soldiers stayed in Kostur for about 20 days. On May 4th Italian soldiers arrived and replaced them. The Italians, as I remember, were jovial people, talkative and smiling all the time...

May 1941.

They arrived in Kostur under the glow of the May morning sun, riding their noisy trucks and motorcycles and carrying their machine guns over their shoulders while singing out loud. They drove their vehicles hard and fast over the Kostur cobblestone streets to create fear. They resented the Macedonians, especially those who had served in the Greek Army and fought very bravely against them. The Greeks, with their eternal hatred for Macedonians, as they did during the Asian campaign (1919 - 1922), now sent the Macedonian soldiers to fight at the frontlines. But, as they demonstrated during the Asian campaign, the Macedonians, once again, showed themselves to be even more courageous at the Tepeleni front fighting against the Italians.

As soon as the Italians settled themselves in Kostur they established military rule and got rid of all Greek symbols and flags flying in homes and public buildings. It took one day to wipe out the entire Greek character of the city. At the same time the Greek government also disappeared and its servants were nowhere to be found. Again, the people did not know what to make of this new invader but it did not take them long to discover that the Italians did not care what language the Macedonians spoke, what religion they belonged to and how they prayed in church. They discovered that they were free to speak their mother tongue anywhere they wished, without being bothered by the authorities. They even got the courage to take down every poster that ordered them to: 'Omilite Elinika!' (Speak Greek!). Every poster was taken down and destroyed."

“Whoever isn’t with me is against me. Whoever doesn’t gather with me scatters!” (Luke 11: 23)

Krapov paused for a moment, looked up and in a mellow tone of voice said: “A couple of days later Colonel Aldo Venier, an older Italian officer, gave a memorable speech during which he said: ‘I would like to inform the residents of Kostur and the surrounding villages that as of today the Greek government has been suspended and you are under the protection of our government.’”

After this news we began to live a new life in Kostur. The mood of the people changed and Kostur came alive... People began to speak Macedonian in the streets, churches, markets... It was a delight listening to people openly speaking the Kostur speech and without fear that somebody might punish them...

The first open thing that we did was to celebrate ‘Ksantika’, the holiday of spring. This was an ancient ritual which belonged to our folk customs. It was a holiday with magical powers, which united the souls of the Macedonian people in their mutual aspiration for survival and for a peaceful life in Kostur. This was an age-old holiday of spring, of love, of freedom, of flowers and of beauty. The people of Kostur, especially the women wore velvet red, green, brown, pink and blue dresses looking attractive and charming. Besides the lavish colourful dresses they also wore kerchiefs embroidered with colourful beads and a variety of jewelry so that they could look their best when dancing the famous dance called ‘Mori Chupi Kosturchanki, rasheretego oroto da vi vime fustanite...’

The Macedonian rebels and freedom fighters also took part in this holiday. They showed deep respect for the traditions of their ancestors by dressing up in Ilinden robes and by wearing belts with bullets and daggers and by giving allegiance to the preservation of our homeland.

During the period after Macedonia was occupied and partitioned in 1913 and before the start of the Second World War, Greek governments made every effort to erase the Macedonian people’s past, particularly their memories of Ilinden. By the start of World War II they had partially succeeded but, in spite of all their efforts,

many Macedonians in Kostur still walked with their heads raised high for which they were cruelly punished, particularly during the Metaxas years. Every Macedonian letter and word was erased and removed, even the inscriptions on gravestones and icons of saints in the Macedonian churches.

But the greatest insult inflicted on our people, particularly on the very old, was when the Greek government ordered them to go to night school to learn the Greek language. This was one of Greece's harshest policies of denationalization and assimilation. Greece banned the use of the Macedonian language even from crying.

I remember a story being told by the people of Kostur from the time they attended night school when old man Trpo asked his neighbour, Tsveta Labamoska, a question:

'Hey Tsveta, do you know any Greek? What is a sickle called in Greek?'

Tsveta replied sharply: 'I don't know. I think those people are trying to brainwash us...'

Trpo then asked: 'Is it called "drapani", I think it's called "drapani".'

Tsveta looked at him sharply and said: 'Drop dead... You're an idiot!'

The people of Kostur finally revolted. It was done on the day of the "bubuni" or great burning fires, in the Delcheto locality where each person brought their notebooks and pencils and tossed them into the fire burning in Sveti Stefan square, in front of the Sveti Giorgi church near the road leading to the large balcony where Italian soldiers stood, laughed and joked with the Kostur girls and with all the people of Kostur who fed the great fire, telling them that their deeds would bring them good health."

Krapov and I stood opposite each other, like two soldiers from opposing camps. But we understood each other well because we had suffered a similar fate, so I asked him to tell me a bit more about those great fires that he called the “bubuni”.

Full of desire he smiled and began to tell me more details of his story.

“In those days,” he said, “something unbelievable took place in our neighbourhood. The bubuni were tall bonfires which we lit during Lent (both small and great Lent).

Each believer was expected to bring a bundle of straw, sticks and firewood from home and add it to a big pile. The pile grew like a tree and when everyone was done piling their contributions the pile was lit and tall flames shot up towards the sky. After the fire died out, those gathered around it jumped over the ashes and unburned materials in hopes that the smoke would drive out the fleas and get rid of the bad from their bodies...”

ELAS (Greek people’s Liberation Army) and the EAM (Greek National Liberation Front) Program formed on September 27, 1941.

ELAS was formed in Rumeli on May 15, 1942, structured in partisan-style detachments with similar goals, as was decided by EAM and the CPG Central Committee during a joint meeting. Its formation was proclaimed by an address to the citizens of Greece and to the former Greek Army officers known for belonging to the bourgeois class. At the time, for the Greeks who formed ELAS, we Macedonians were just “Slavophones” and nothing more. We were simply living soldiers just like our fathers had been in previous wars. At that time we may have loudly sung: “Embros ELAS gia tin Ellada...” (Forward ELAS for Greece...) and nothing more. But there is one more undeniable fact; every person that joined ELAS had to take an oath.

The Macedonian communists who joined the ranks of the CPG and ELAS had to take the following ELAS oath: “I, son of the people of Greece and fighter of the Democratic Army of Greece, swear that I

will fight with a rifle in hand, will shed my blood and will give my life for the stability and independence of Greece.”

After being silent for a while, Krapov suddenly raised his head, thought for a moment and said: “We, the people of Kostur, have equally shared our fortunes and misfortune. We were never too happy or too unhappy and, as the old people used to say, ‘and as such was our twisted fate!’...”

One autumn day in 1942

One day, a dangerous article appeared in a Greek newspaper calling for more land to be found for food cultivation.

The article was not written by just anyone; it was written by His Majesty George II claiming that “Greece is finding itself restrained by its current borders and lacks land which it needs to ensure a steady food supply for its people. This lack of land prohibits Greece from developing its economy and as such King George proclaimed the right to occupy territory in the Balkan Peninsula.”

There was quick reaction to this strategy by deserting Greeks from Athens who were very worried that a Macedonian Patriotic Organization was about to be formed in Kostur with aims at fighting for the protection of Macedonian rights under Italian rule. There was a massive turnout of Macedonian volunteers from all the Kostur Region villages who were more than willing to join the Macedonian freedom-fighting units.

The great winter of December 1942 and January 1943

It was early 1943 when Greek politicians still lived off politics, when they urgently got together in Athens under the guidance of the quisling government headed by Mr. Papandreou and formed a special Commission composed of state university professors and politicians, to deal with the Kostur phenomenon in Greek occupied Macedonia. The Commission immediately established the organizations IVE (Protection of Northern Greece), EEE (Greek National Union), PAO (Pan-Hellenic Liberation Organization), EKA (Greek Social Security and Defense) and others.

Surprisingly, an unprecedented reunion took place among the squabbling Greeks. Everyone agreed with everything that called for the “national liberation of Greece”. After that a large number of officers from the nationalist organization ESA, under orders, infiltrated ELAS partisan units and were even entrusted with command positions.

“What do you think the situation among us Macedonians was like at the time?” Krapov asked.

After thinking for a moment I said: “From what I remember, from what the older people used to say, after Macedonia was divided the Macedonian people developed three views of patriotism. On our side, we all bowed our heads down and accepted Greek slavery. We were hoping that because the Greeks were Christians they would treat us better than the Ottomans had... I remember asking my grandparents why they accepted to live under Greek slavery and they used to say that this was our homeland from time immemorial, and that this too would pass. The Greeks will leave one day just like the Ottomans did!

I remember my grandparents telling me about their life during the struggle against the Ottomans when, one time, I asked them why they fought. My grandmother said: ‘Because we were Christians, we fought for Christianity, unfortunately we Macedonians have been cursed by God and made to suffer and to serve foreign masters like the Ottomans, the Greeks, the Serbians and Bulgarians who want to change our identities and turn us into something we are not...’

The logic of these Greek organizations was simple: vilify the Macedonian people and terrorize them to no end. They organized unprecedented terror, maltreatment, murders, burning of crops, deforestation and eviction of innocent people from their homes simply because of minor infractions. They were punished simply because they broke some racist law passed by the Greek powers; a law such as the one that banned the Macedonian language or renamed personal names and toponyms.”

The first ELAS partisan units appeared in Kostur Region. They were led mostly by EKA officers like Baskakis, Zisis, Kirtsidakis, Efremidis, Kolaras and other evildoers who seized the opportunity to organize terrorist actions against prominent Macedonians, including against those who fought during the Ilinden Uprising and their descendants. In May 1943 Andreas Dzhimas, a member of ELAS General Headquarters and a declared communist, during a meeting with ELAS senior staff, among other things said: “...nationalist groups have appeared in this first period in Kostur. These groups are promoting hostile policies to the Macedonians which are unsympathetic towards the Greek partisans. These groups are hostile and dangerous for the partisans. With their actions they make it harder for EAM-ELAS and the CPG to function in attracting Macedonians into our ranks...”

Brochures with intimidating slogans...

Krapov, not wanting to speak loudly, sighed and whispered: “At that time, especially in Kostur Region, the Greeks scattered leaflets with intimidating slogans against us Macedonians.”

Krapov continued: “Many things happened in Kostur at that time. Greeks of all ideologies and from all corners of Greece united against us making us their object of torment and dividing us along every conceivable line. On top of that more than 1,800 Macedonians were serving in the ranks of ELAS. Many considered themselves to be staunch communists but we called them people with ideological tattoos. Strangely, there was also a unit in the ranks of ELAS exclusively populated with Macedonian women but commanded by Greek nationalist officers who had infiltrated ELAS and who hated both the Macedonian and Greek communists. Included among the infiltrators who led partisan units were Portis, Kirtsidakis, Bashkakis, Zisis, Mandaropoulos, Efremidis, Minchos, Kolaras and others who on April 8, 1943 formed a large group of ELAS fighters totaling 3,500. Of these, 2,130 were from Kostur Region and split from the others. They vowed that from that day on forward they would fight against the anti-communists and anti-insurgents who were still in the ranks of ELAS.

Our people, who constituted the Kostur freedom fighting units, lived in a daily nightmare. But still, they were not the kind of people who wanted to hide behind others. Not like the skillful communist demagogues, Macedonians included amongst them, who had ready answers to every question and claimed that communism was the cure to all ills in the future life of all Macedonians, including the people of Kostur. These demagogues preached that communism would solve every problem and that all the people had to do was get their communist tattoos.

This ‘care and love’, shown by these Greekophile Macedonians, was never part of our centuries-old Macedonian historical tradition; it was built on the backs of the Macedonian people, starting with the arrival of Bishop Karavangelis and propagated by the first Greek Andartes in the early 20th century.

Outside of the Macedonian communists, Macedonian ELAS fighters and Greekophile Macedonians, there were many Macedonians who would have cut their own veins for Greece. Unfortunately the majority of these Macedonians did not want to know anything about what was going on because of their bad experiences in the past; the Greek Church and Greater-Greece propaganda had pushed many Greeks to view the Macedonian people as prey, which one day must be put back in the old cage. So they would have done anything to placate the Greeks and keep them happy; tactics that historically have never worked...

The first partisan unit combat actions were conducted in the southwestern part of Greek occupied Macedonia, mainly in Kostur Region, at the end of 1942 and in early 1943. They were led by Greek nationalist officers and were directed against prominent Macedonians and against the descendants of the Ilinden Uprising fighters. On March 4, 1943 they gathered in the village Nestram where they proclaimed a people’s revolt but the speakers and CPG and EAM leadership said nothing about Macedonian national rights or about the fate of the Macedonian people. The Greek nationalist revolt was directed against the Macedonian people and called for their destruction, which could only be saved if the Macedonian people joined their ranks.

On March 5, 1943 a Macedonian Committee was formed in Kostur with its own Macedonian military formations.

The Kostur Committee was authentic and the first line of resistance against Hellenism in 1943. These fighters defended the spirit and essence of the Macedonian people.

A meeting was called on March 5, 1943, attended by 48 members and representatives from various local villages. It was decided to form a 'self defense' organization called 'Macedonian Committee' for Kostur Region, which was to serve about 60 villages. They were given permission to arm themselves because the Italian authorities felt they needed to protect themselves from the Greeks who meant to do them harm."

Krapov looked up, smiled, took his first sip of coffee and looked at me with a sad look on his face. He then wiped the sweat from his forehead and looked down again. The expression on his face changed, he looked sad and uncomfortable reminiscent of those times when he had told me sad things about life and the pain he had endured. He then rubbed his face and continued:

"It was a time when a lot more patriots existed in Kostur than traitors.

It was the first time in a long time in Kostur that so many people got together that day, during our spiritual holiday 'Ksantika', and genuinely smiled at each other and the women wore festive clothes, new shoes, velvet dresses and long braids. They sang and danced as we the bachelors, along with the Italian carabinieri, looked on enthralled by their beauty.

Even God must have been amazed at how the Greeks, in the short twenty-five years they had been in Kostur and in our county, had sown so much hatred among our people. Hatred and envy had gripped the people of Kostur so much so that they did not even celebrate Easter in our churches like old times. But now that the Greeks were gone, it seemed that even the faces and eyes of our saints were brighter and they smiled at us...

The old links between Macedonians and Greeks, marriages, friendships, the carefree gatherings and drinking with the teachers; became increasingly fewer and broken between the Macedonian Greekophiles and their Greek counterparts. The times of fear were slowly going away...

All we Macedonians needed now was to unite. We were forced into a situation where we had to fight for our lives with arms. All this culminated on March 5, 1943, the day we declared the people's uprising in Kostur Region; an uprising which represented the first real resistance against Hellenism; an uprising organized by the sons and grandsons of the Ilinden fighters; the day everyone rejoiced at the prospect of breaking away from the deadly Greek embrace.

My freedom fighting grandfather, when speaking about the communists, Greekophiles and ELAS fighters, one time said: 'You can't make plans with people who aspire to other goals...' I think he was quoting Confucius."

Krapov looked at me with an apathetic and quiet look, so I said: "I admire how well you remember all these things after all those years. It is really nice of you."

I then thought to myself, every person who carefully listens to this man will discover the effort he goes through to carry all this weight on his shoulders all these years. It must be a great burden for him... even the questions he is asked... The memories alone must be a drain.

Krapov's mood quickly changed and he went silent again. Then silent, he flinched as if he had forgotten something important and continued:

"Do you know how it was then? It was hard! It was a time of uncertainties and poverty, threats, dangerous divisions and it was very important that we survive.

Fears were passed on from one generation to the next, especially in Kostur where we have coexisted with various regimes who occupied us, regimes like the Ottomans and the Greeks, especially the Greeks

who did everything in their power to make life difficult for us. In Kostur we also had generations of educated people who had finished university and did not know any other world except the one that surrounded them. Those young people accepted the world the way it was. They knew nothing of insurrections or revolutions like the Ilinden Uprising and did not understand that the rules of the game needed to be changed, because for them the game had always been the same. The rules of this game were simple: nothing was certain and we were active in conditions of complete uncertainty. In such a situation the people of Kostur were faced with two feelings: One, no matter how communist ideas were propagated and how many million questions were asked and answered, many people felt like they were insufficiently informed because they felt unsafe and were uncertain of what was going to happen.

Two, almost every family living in Kostur Region had relatives who had participated in the Ilinden Uprising and their stories were well-known, passed on from grandparents to grandchildren. The heroism of their ancestors and why they fought was well-known to them.

The people of Kostur gladly formed strong opinions often based on bias. They usually entered into conversations without arguing and were often prepared to hear out arguments that were in support of their beliefs. The Grkomani (Greekophile Macedonians) always had an ironic smile on their faces which puzzled people, making them wonder how they could smile and at the same time stab people, or watch others stab people in the back.

The older generation, which was continuously tormented by Greek assimilatory practices and constantly felt humiliated, at that time felt up to the task; to defend the honour of the Macedonian people. People of that generation finally felt like individuals, like being the creative and autonomous leaders their own people expected.”

Krapov’s last comment reminded me of one of the comments by Leo Tolstoy, who said: “In life, as it is in chess, we spot our mistakes after others take advantage of them.”

Krapov looked at me strangely, but only for a moment. He then adjusted himself, stood up slightly and continued:

“We Macedonians have always been wrong about our rights which made me wonder; ‘Can a person obtain all his rights in one day and fix all the mistakes he made during his entire life?’

Well, this is the Macedonian condition. But let me tell you this. The Kostur freedom fighters tackled this problem and showed us that everything was possible. They managed to quickly overcome the problems which the Greeks had built up over decades. Whatever ill the Greeks had done and the divisions they caused amongst us were quickly overcome when the Macedonian freedom fighters rose to the task and took our fate into their hands. Their emergence and rise was greeted with great joy and relief by the people of Kostur. They were the hope that people were looking for to liberate them and free them from Greek slavery.

At the time when the freedom fighters were in control in Kostur, a lot of Macedonian people, in their newly discovered freedom, contemplated kicking the Greeks out of Macedonia. They often talked about the wrongs done to them and about the reasons why the Greeks were so hostile against them to a point where Greek governments wanted to exile them all out of their centuries-old lands and homes. The short Greek occupation was far more inhumane than the five hundred years of Ottoman rule.

I want every Macedonian to know that the freedom fighting movement in Kostur was a result of Greek anti-Macedonian policies and practices and the oppression Macedonians experienced under various Greek governments and under the communists.

ELAS command and the CPG District Committee, filled with Greek nationalism, failed to understand why there were Macedonian freedom fighters in Kostur and how to get rid of them. One way to eliminate this phenomenon was by meeting the people’s wishes and aspirations. But instead of doing that the Greek leadership opted for the use of military force to suppress the guerillas. ELAS units were dispatched to the village Starichani in Kostur Region on May 1st,

1943 by the Greek leadership to commit massacres. But instead of eliminating the freedom movement, the attack made it stronger.

You should also know that the freedom fighting movement was first started by the people of Kostur who were brought up in the Macedonian tradition and were followers of the Ilinden revolutionary movement. This movement was started in Kostur in March 1943 and later spread to other parts of Greek occupied Macedonia. It was a time when everyone sang Macedonian songs everywhere...” concluded Krapov with a smile on his face.

As we walked along we entered a wide cobblestone street leading to “ribarska” (the fish market) and heard the lake water splashing. Krsto Krapov then exhaled loudly and began to talk again:

“Well, this is how it was: Right here, in this wide cobblestone road, the mellow sound of a trumpet would have been heard playing under the shining summer sun. And as you moved closer you would have heard many instruments play strange music. It would have been marching music. After that you would have seen women passing by through the crowded street. You would have noticed that the women were dressed in Ilinden style revolutionary dresses, proudly walking along with a sense of national belonging with a certain kick in their step...

To you it would seem like many generations of people, stretched through the ages, were appearing before your eyes... which would fill them with tears.

You would have heard a song sung by a beautiful male voice: ‘Od grob stanale slavnite iunatsi...’ You would have also heard songs sung about our Ilinden heroes like Commanders Vasil Chakalarov, Lazar Pop Traikov, Manol Rizov, Pando Kliashev, Atanas Krshakov, Mitre Pandzharov, Pando Sindov, Nikola Dobrolitski, Kuzo Stefov, Georgi Shkornov, Trpo Georgiev, Lazaar Moskov, Pavle Hristo and many other fighters and leaders.

You would have imagined our commanders riding white horses, seeming like they were making history... And walking behind them, with a rebellious spirit, one behind another followed the Aposkepska, Setomska, Tioliska, Kondorabska, Lichiska, Gorenska, Bobitska, Olitska, Zagoritska, Prekopanska, Vishenka, Shestevarska, Pozdivska, Konomladska, Dobrolitska... freedom fighting units. After that you would have heard the march of the freedom fighters which would have gone something like this:

Ima li nekoj koi shto ne znae! (Is there anyone who does not know!)
Do deka e Makedonia: (To where Macedonia extends:)
Solun i Voden (Solun and Voden)
Lerin i Kostur (Lerin and Kostur)
Tamu se biat Makedontsite! (There Macedonians are fighting!)
Borbeni chekori bea se posilni. (Battle steps are stronger.)
Se slusha mashki borben glas od voivoda Dobrolitski: (The combative male voice of Commander Dobrolitski is heard:)
Voivodi i Komiti! (Commanders and freedom fighters!)
Brakia i sestri! (Brothers and sisters!)

Then came the speeches given by the commanders which would have gone something like this: ‘Today is Ilinden! It is a day of the future for the affirmation of the Macedonian national being.

Dear brothers and sisters! The time has come when we must say enough is enough! We must say enough to all the black gangs that sow death in our villages!

We are making history today as we put an end to centuries of drama on the soil of Kostur: to the suffering, to the invasions, to the looting, to the renaming and to the slaughter of our people...

Dear people of Kostur be brave because you are Macedonians!
Because bravery is part of your tradition.

The people of Kostur have been beaten and murdered but we have not changed our national identity. Let it be known that we Macedonians from Kostur are strong and cannot be broken.

Long live Macedonia!’

When I heard this speech it touched me and I immediately went to the Headquarters where I took an oath that went something like this: ‘I Krsto Krapov, solemnly swear to my last drop of blood that I will fight to free Macedonia! I will be loyal to the Kostur Committee and will never become a traitor! If I break these rules then I accept the fate delivered to me by the pistol and dagger over which I swear! Freedom or death!’

On April 9, 1943, for the first time after 30 years of harsh Greek rule, the local government finally fell into the hands of the Macedonian people...

Local committees, consisting only of Macedonians from our villages, were formed...”

Krapov paused for a moment, smiled and then continued: “We, the Macedonian freedom fighters, for the first time since the 1913 Greek occupation, came to an agreement with the Italian Kostur garrison commander and chief commander of the occupation zone Kostur and Kostur Region, a colonel named A. Vinieri, and on April 9, 1943 took over the local government and our people, for the first time, governed themselves with their local committees, which until the day before had been under Greek rule. This is a documented fact which can be found in the Italian archives. This fact should have been made known to everyone a long time ago and not after a century of silence, because it was part of our history!

A month after the Kostur Committee was formed we were visited by Colonel Vinieri who delivered a letter (No. 617) to the ‘Macedonian Kostur Committee’ regarding the security of the region in which he proposed that the Greek authorities be expelled from the Macedonian territory. The region was then to be divided into zones and each zone was to be protected by appointed Macedonian volunteers with their own commanders who then would be attached to a single command located in one of the nearby villages.

According to this agreement, between Colonel Vinieri and the Macedonian Kostur Committee, the Kostur Italian occupied territory was divided into 15 zones with their own centres as follows:

Zone 1 – with its centre located in the village Orovo, Prespa Region;
Zone 2 – with its centre located in the village German, Prespa Region;
Zone 3 – with its centre located in the village Zhelevo, Lerin Region;
Zone 4 – with its centre located in the village Breznitsa, Kostur Region;
Zone 5 – with its centre located in the village V'mbel, Kostur Region;
Zone 6 – with its centre located in the village Dobrolishta, Kostur Region;
Zone 7 – with its centre located in the village Pozdivishta, Kostur Region;
Zone 8 – with its centre located in the village Chetirok, Kostur Region;
Zone 9 – with its centre located in the village Kostur;
Zone 10 – with its centre located in the village Zagoricheni, Kostur Region;
Zone 11 – with its centre located in the village Dranichevo, Kostur Region;
Zone 12 – with its centre located in the village Zhelegozhe, Kostur Region;
Zone 13 – with its centre located in the village Gorentsi, Kostur Region;
Zone 14 – with its centre located in the village Radigozhe, Kostur Region;
Zone 15 – with its centre located in the village Hrupishta, Kostur Region;

Each unit was assigned to protect four villages. When they were attacked by ELAS fighters they combined forces and, with help from Kostur, they jointly fought back.

Believe me, our fight for our homeland was easy, but then everything got twisted by other people's ideologies and we all became victims of the struggle for the liberation of Macedonia.

I saw freedom fighters with my own eyes dying with the words: 'Long live Macedonia, long live our motherland!' The rebels loved

and felt connected to Macedonia. The rebels also knew how to live at the bottom; being humiliated, being spat on, being angry at, having no joy, being constantly criticized and never praised or recognized for their deeds. The rebels did not easily give up and knew how to cast a shadow. They were proud people, never wanted to be unjust and always searched for the truth. And above all, they remembered when good or evil was done to them and so they in turn paid it back.

When they were in trouble, the rebels showed no distress, they sang, worked, dreamed... and knew that their existence in the city might be brief and painful. Even though the rebels were dragged through hell they were still spirited, rebellious, violent and wild. They were smart, loving and honoured tragedians.

Because of the courage, devotion and sacrifices they made for their country, the people of Kostur were safe from being slaughtered.”

Krapov paused for a moment, looked at me and excitedly began to tell me about the unprecedented bravery of Commander Bai Kolio. Krapov admired Kolio very much and was very excited when she spoke about him, so excited so that his heart began to beat hard, so hard that it was ready to explode out of his chest. Watching him made me very sad and to avoid getting emotional I bit my lip.

Krapov continued: “My parents were pious and devout,” he said. “They knew that I would willingly volunteer to join the movement. It was a virtuous time. Then when I took the oath that I would fight for the freedom of Macedonia and to free Kostur, my parents surprised me by congratulating me and wholeheartedly giving me their blessings. I was also congratulated by the oldest rebels, which made me feel good. I felt so much love that I could not hold back my tears. And thus my love for Kostur and for Macedonia became permanently imprinted in my soul.

Unfortunately the Kostur revolutionaries have now been forgotten. Forgotten are the Ilinden fighters who fought against the cutthroat Greek Andartes. Forgotten are the Kostur rebels who fought against PAO and ELAS...

The persecution of our rebels inside our homeland and outside is like an illness which still sits like a lump in my soul. The real heroes who fought for Kostur and for Macedonia's freedom are condemned and persecuted while the criminals, the Andartes and the ELAS traitors, are praised for their deeds... What a shame...

Today both the rebels and the communists find themselves on foreign shores, scattered throughout the world and feeling homesick. I know the rebels fought for Kostur and for Macedonia but I don't know what the ELAS fighters and the communists fought for? They certainly did not fight for Macedonia or for Macedonia's interests. I hope they realize that..." concluded Krapov who then went silent.

When I try to think of what took place in the years 1940 to 1949 all I remember is my life passing me by like a film. Sequences strung together of the joy of my childhood and my love of Kostur... All this reminded me of silent witnesses passing through strange passages...

"My father used to say," speak up Krapov, "Communism is no good... Religion is no good... One and the other are the opium of the people. We learned a great deal of how religion can be abused from Bishop Karavangelis. He sold religion and by doing so not only managed to sneak the Greek Church into Macedonia but convinced the Macedonian people to believe that the Greek Church is God's church and either defrocked all Macedonian priests or turned them into Greek priests.

He persuaded no one that faith was a good thing, he just used it to do malicious deeds to Hellenize Macedonia and to expel all those Macedonians who refuse to bend to his will.

A few decades later, again in our lifetime, the Communists did the same thing by forcefully propagating communism; calling it a great ideology. But for who? Not for the Macedonians!

My father used to say that the Communists are people who, while wanting to learn to swim, keep one foot in the water and the other on shore. But as time has shown they learned neither to swim nor to remain on shore. Now far from home, living in isolation, some are

willing to admit that perhaps some of this so-called great ideology was incorrectly applied.

The communists or former ELAS fighters, both Greeks and Macedonians, who fought together against the Kostur rebels, after the war ended were taken to Tashkent and left there. Then, when the time came to return home, only the Greeks were allowed to enter Greece, the Macedonians were left to roam the globe homeless. Perhaps there is a lesson in there somewhere...” concluded Krapov.

Krapov, for some reason, began to look more nervous than usual. He raised his shoulders and looked at me with a stern look on his face. It seemed like something was bothering him.

He opened his eyes wide open, at which point I noticed a vein on his face pulse at a fast rate. He was in deep thought attempting to organize in his thoughts what he wanted to say. Then, suddenly, in his usual tone of voice he began talking. He said: “I can see that you want to know more... more about how the rebellion was born...

Clearly we are all familiar with the Nazis of the Third Reich who wanted the Jews to disappear. The Jews, on the other hand, could not accept that they had to disappear because the Nazis wanted them to. The same thing happened to us Macedonians. The Greeks were publicly saying that we too should disappear... ‘We don’t need the Macedonians, we just want Macedonia!’ they used to say. And they succeeded in getting it. For more information on this see Karvitis. Karvitis was one of the first Andart executioners to come to Macedonia in 1903. He wrote about this in his book “O makedonikos Agon”.

Well, this was the strategy of the conventional Greek state: one king, one nation, one language and one church.

But if we look closer at the Greeks, they had two languages; the Katharevusa and the Demotic.

While they had two languages we were not allowed to even have one, that's why many Macedonians in Kostur and throughout the whole of Greek occupied Macedonia were boiling in anger.

Greece always treated the Macedonians, not according to the reality of the situation but according to its bilateral national interests (for example at the Asia Minor and at the Italian front the Macedonians were placed in front line combat and the results for the Macedonians were catastrophic).

The rebels had an aim: Give voice to the oppressed because injustice was painful!

Allow me to tell you a thing or two about our past, about our Macedonian truth. When your enemies bury your history you can never find the truth. Macedonia's enemies have buried Macedonia's history and there is very little that still remains out there but it is not how the ideological activists tell it.

Let me put it this way: Right in front of us rebels stood the enemy who clearly wanted to destroy us as soon as possible..."

For some reason I felt the need to interrupt and ask: "Who? Who organized the destruction of the rebel movement?"

I guess my interruption was premature because it was followed by a long and tense pause as Krapov stared at me intensely like I was a little child standing in front of my front door waiting for something to happen. I thought he wasn't going to answer me but he did not, he said: "We the rebels were sworn to tell the truth! Our commanders used to say: 'We must not leave our offspring in burden and in shame'. We were determined to fight to the death. That's how we operated. Yes, those were the times, but since then we Macedonians have changed. The people of Kostur have disappeared from Kostur and from Kostur Region; they are all over the world now..."

What do you think, who has remained in Kostur? ...Only Greeks and Grkomani (Macedonians who think they are Greeks).

Now there is no one left, no rebels, no Macedonian ELAS fighters and no Macedonian communists to send us down the river. There are no more communists with easy answers to everything, claiming to know what Marxism was all about and how future communist societies were going to look like. There are no more communists who believe that all Macedonians, including the people of Kostur, will find and obtain all their human rights. It was a time of lies and deception. Yes it was... After that we had the people of NOF pushing us to join DAG, telling us to fight for Macedonia and against the king, and in the end, they too were sent to Siberia. That's how it was...

Our old people used to say: 'The Greeks who wanted their king were the same Greeks who wanted Stalin...'

Look at them now, all happy and proud living good lives in our homes and lands and we Macedonians, being lied to, have lost our homes and our lands forever. We Macedonians lived in an era of endless war and the majority of the people of Kostur in the 20th century spent their lives fighting.

And as my old Kostur fisherman grandfather Doro used to say: 'Only our swearing gave us relief from our pain.' We easily fled abroad, leaving the beauty of Kostur in ignorance, abandoning it to the newcomer Madzhiri (Turkish Christian colonists and settlers deposited in Macedonia by Greek governments) and allowing them to become the masters of our country," concluded Krapov.

May 1943

In May 1943, almost thirty years ago, Krsto Krapov joined a rebel detachment and fought against PAO and ELAS and since then, with his courage and determination, became a commander at age 23. In October 1943 he was wounded during a brutal battle in the village Zagoricheni, near Sveti Vrach. But this was not the last time he was wounded. In 1944 during the final year of the Second World War, he was again wounded and captured by ELAS. Those who captured him were Macedonians, activists and faithful ideological servants of ELAS.

“Ideology in those days,” continued Krapov, “was a hot commodity jovially accepted by every Macedonian, especially since it was recommended and served by Macedonians in authority wearing beautiful uniforms and carrying red cards in their pockets.

Fear of a Macedonian Resurrection with a Macedonian revolutionary platform

In the end, our cemeteries and graveyards grew and multiplied. In time more and more of us died. We died by the hundreds, gone forever, vanished in history, not as Macedonians but as unknowns... people without identities. We were killed in groups and not as soldiers with a military existence, with our own physiognomy, revolutionary character, hopes, wishes and plans for a free Kostur... We died and disappeared... as if we had never existed... Look at Kostur’s history for the first half of the 20th century... what do you find? It reads as if we never existed... no human endeavours... no struggles for liberation... only dirty politics put there by our occupiers and neighbours to enable themselves to kick us out of Kostur. As you can see we have no past... no history... we live in the present... everything else is memories, heroes and graves. Shadows of history!”

Twenty or so years later, Krapov, 75 years old now, is left only with his memories of those days in 1943, memories which are intertwined with everyday effects, an experience which has left him with deep scars.

He said: “The past for me is more important than the present. For a long time, even to this day, I am unable to uncover: WHY?!”

Now, most of all he loves the spring, he loves it even more than the fall. He loved the rain, the silence, the isolation, to be alone... He always loved the spring more than the summer.

I got enough courage to ask Krapov another question. I looked in his direction and said: “Were the rebels familiar with their own debt and power?”

He gave me a sharp answer: “The rebels,” he said, “loved and protected our fatherland. It was their own homeland from a long time ago and their place of birth. They were not cosmopolitans like the communists who served only the Communist Party. Those Macedonians in the ranks of ELAS had not developed abilities of deep reasoning about their own country like the rebels had, whose interests were in Macedonia and about the freedom and well-being of Macedonia and the Macedonian people. The communists just followed orders like slaves and were easily manipulated by those who led them and as a result remained under the strict control of foreign gods.

After failing to destroy the rebels, Siantos, leader of the CPG, sought help from the CPY by meeting with the Montenegrin, Tempo.

In their talks in August 1943, Siantos asked Tempo to create special units in Greek occupied Macedonia to agitate and spread propaganda in the Macedonian language. This is how the first lies were spread. Concretely SNOF was organized but not by the Macedonians.

Concern for the Macedonians or total manipulation?!

SNOF (Slavo-Macedonian People’s Liberation Front) was created on October 20th, 1943 in the village Snichani, Kostur Region by Christos Kalfas-Andreas, CPG District Committee Secretary for Western Macedonia, Antonis Andonopoulos – Periklis, CPG District Committee Secretary for Kostur Region and Thanassis Kartsunis, CPG District Committee Secretary for Kozheni Region. All this was done with the intent of attracting and breaking up the rebels by assuring them that SNOF was a Macedonian established organization.

Immediately after their creation, the Macedonian SNOF battalions received orders to liquidate the rebel formations. On August 21, 1943 the Kostur battalion attacked several armed rebel villages and managed to disarm a large number of rebel fighters. Towards the end of August, 300 rebels from Kostur Region joined the Kostur-Lerin Macedonian battalion.

Unfortunately organizations such as SNOF and others like it were disbanded on September 26, 1944. By signing the Caserta agreement the fate of the Left including the fate of the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia, was definitely sealed. The Macedonian people put their hope and trust in the Leftists, only to be betrayed.

With ELAS's defeat and the signing of the Varkiza agreement on February 12, 1945, a new situation was created in Greek occupied Macedonia.

I often wondered: 'Was the eradication of the Macedonian rebels part of some early plan to perpetrate genocide against the people of Kostur and Kostur Region? How can communism be so hypocritical? Perhaps the people who abused communism were hypocritical but then it is difficult to call them communists.'

SNOF's political program was a platform for a joint struggle between Macedonians and Greeks. It called for mass mobilization of Macedonians in ELAS units for the purpose of conducting an armed struggle against the Macedonian rebels and against the occupiers.

You will find more information about this in a book ("Yugoslav Communists and the Macedonian Question" by Steve E. Palmer and Robert P. King, Archon Books, 1971, p. 94-95) where the following was written:

'In the beginning of May 1943, Tempo established contact with the Greek Communists, in an attempt to establish domination of the CPY in Greek occupied Macedonia, which smouldered from the repressive measures applied by the Metexas dictatorship before the war. The situation was ignited by the Italian occupiers who organized special Macedonian gendarmes (Kostur rebels) to fight against the Greeks. The Kostur rebels received carte blanche and their influence was dangerous for CPY plans in Macedonia in a Yugoslav framework. Tempo suggested that it would be good to allow Tito's agents (Macedonians in ELAS and the CPG) to organize and lead the Macedonians in Greece. The Greeks refused. Tempo however took his case to the Supreme Command of the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS) which then allowed the

Greek Macedonians to organize the Slavic National Liberation Fronts (SNOF). ELAS Command immediately agreed to combine military actions with the Yugoslav partisans but, of course, was not thrilled with the formation of separate Greek Slav units because it seemed like a move to enable Yugoslav efforts to create a Greater Macedonia. It was possible that Greece could lose Aegean Macedonia and that was the main black point of the Greek communists. Agreement to such a proposal, no matter how it was camouflaged in plans for some kind of Balkan Communist Federation, was going to strongly jeopardize their mass support.’

On August 8, in a letter to the CPG Central Committee, Tempo accepted the Greek Communist insistence to preserve discretion: ‘The Greek party has the following position on the issue of Macedonia. I.e. the Macedonian minority in Greece will gain its freedom and will be safe from any kind of national oppression.’ They did not recognize any right to self-determination for the Macedonian nation.

The turmoil triggered among the Macedonian people by Siantos and Tempo is incomprehensible even to this day. It is hard to believe that Macedonians, participants in the ranks of ELAS, took part in the destruction of the Kostur rebels. It is hard to believe that they attacked 9,800 armed rebels in 64 villages; Macedonians who stood bravely against Hellenism to protect our people and our national identity. Instead of valourizing these brave fighters as a Macedonian national resistance dedicated to protecting Macedonian interests, we blackened our own history by attacking them! And whose interests were we protecting when we did that? The Party’s? What is funnier about this sordid affair is that in the end, the rebels left alive were recruited to fight for the communists... The best sons of Macedonia were recruited to fight for the interests of the Party...

If ever there was a nation in the world that had broken something created by its own people eons ago, then we the Macedonians must be the first. Our biggest sin was the destruction of the Macedonian rebel fighters in Kostur.

The appearance of the Kostur rebel fighters was an extraordinary moment in Macedonia’s reality, but in place of showing respect and

dignity for them we entered a new political game and destroyed them. We now have to live with that sin.

We also need to know that the rebels experienced the worst discrimination from the Greek state since the day they were born, but on top of that the Greeks made sure that they were vilified, recklessly anathematized and their history, along with their sacrifices, were forgotten,” concluded Krapov.

I looked up at Krapov, paused for a moment and apologetically said: “For a long time I wanted to return to Kostur, to my native roots, to my birthplace, but had no idea how severely the Macedonian population was oppressed and this was done in one decade from 1940 to 1949 and since then everything that was sacred to us has been erased. What can you tell me about ...?”

Before I had a chance to finish asking my question, Krsto Krapov excitedly interrupted and said: “Well, I remember everything as if it happened yesterday. We used to call the Macedonians ‘our people’ and many of those Macedonians who had joined the ranks of ELAS had participated in the destruction of the rebels. Many shot the rebels in the back. What kind of depravity was that? Where was the honour in shooting a man in the back; a fellow Macedonian no less... And for what? For defending your home and your honour? How is our Macedonian history going to deal with that? How is our history going to deal with crimes committed against our people by our people? They were killing our defenders and fighters who fought for a United Macedonia. Unfortunately they were labeled and anathematized as autonomists and separatists by strangers. We believed and put our trust in strangers above our own people... And this was done by Macedonian ELAS fighters who were fighting for whose interests? They were certainly not fighting for Macedonian interests? That’s for sure! No wonder we lost everything including our native hearth...

The Macedonian population here in Kostur Region suffered immensely from ‘split personality disorder’... that’s for sure,”

concluded Krapov, pausing for a moment, looking at me and continuing:

“The battles that took place here in Kostur and Kostur Region, for example, opened many questions about our lives and everything that happened here. Unfortunately no one wants to take responsibility or show any guilt for what happened. When asked, ELAS fighters swear up and down and insist that they were fighting for Macedonia.”

Krapov showed anger in his face. He had difficulty calming down. This was anger that had been building inside of him over the years and was about to erupt.

“I have difficulty rationalizing what happened here,” he said, “and find it impossible to accept, especially after what happened to us. Now we feel like strangers in our own birthplace, in our beloved Kostur and in our own country... we feel this way every time we return to our homes.

This question too bothers me: ‘Why did CPG Secretary General Siantos not negotiate with the Macedonian communists in the Republic of Macedonia or with those in Greek occupied Macedonia? Why did he not negotiate with the Macedonian ELAS fighters? Why did he ask to negotiate with a senior representative of the CPY - Yugoslavia? And after he did, how did the Macedonian communists react?’

They did not react at all! They just accepted what Tempo had offered them. Tempo was all for a Macedonian movement with pro-Yugoslav tendencies. The Greeks too placed their faith in Tempo believing that the CPY was all for removing or eliminating CPM General Secretary Metodi Shatorov – Sharlo along with the idea of a spiritual unification of all of Macedonia. In other words, the CPY had plans to destroy the spiritual unification of the ethnic composition of all of Macedonia and the Greeks were happy with that plan.”

Krapov raised his shoulders, looked at me with a worried look on his face, which made me worry even more, and unrestrained began to speak again, telling me more details:

“About us Macedonians, especially about us here in Greek occupied Macedonia,” he said, “after this became evident, no matter what kind of action we took regarding a united Macedonia, we would have been stopped by the CPG and by the CPY.

So, now everything was political conducted at Party and State level between Greece and Yugoslavia. The same thing was done with Albania. On June 20th, 1943 a protocol for close military cooperation was signed at the Albanian National Liberation War Headquarters by political representatives Svetozar Vukmanovik – Tempo of Yugoslavia (CPY), Enver Hoxha of Albania (CPA) and Verberis of Greece (CPG).

Papandreou’s government in Cairo insisted that this kind of agreement be made at this level. Keep in mind that this agreement and this level was accepted and resolved in Yugoslavia by subordinating Sharlo and the entire CPM Party leadership and its new platform. Papandreou’s government demanded that the CPG and ELAS not accept compromises with the Macedonians: whether they were from Greek occupied Macedonia or from the Republic of Macedonia; no compromise that might bring historical consequences for Greece and its sovereignty. I don’t know what more needed to happen in order for the Macedonian Communists in Greek occupied Macedonia to realize that, for the CPG and ELAS, they were not a political entity. They were only a temporary fake entity fabricated by Tempo’s lies.

Allow me to also emphasize that this agreement, now signed by representatives of the CPY and the CPG, was an extension of the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest signed by Yugoslavia and Greece, among others.

So, what did this mean for us Macedonians? By defending the communist ideology we not only lost many lives and suffered immensely, we lost our homes and identity. We took our destiny in our hands and handed it over to our occupiers when we partnered

with them and they in turn evicted us from our ancestral lands and told the world we don't exist. But that was not all...

The second lie – Following Tempo and Siantos's Agreement

On September 1st, 1943 the wise CPG, EAM and ELAS leadership established the all-Macedonian 'Lazo Trpovski' Detachment in the Beriki locality in Kostur Region. This detachment was part of ELAS and its appointed commander was Naum Peiov."

I interrupted Krapov and asked: "Is there anything more undeserving than to have the disposition of the strong dependent on foreign cruelty?"

He said: "You know that wild animals become tame towards those who feed them, why wouldn't man. In situations such as this the wise do not get angry at those who make mistakes.

A lie such as this had success even in the early days. Those rebels and other Macedonians who refused to serve in the ranks of ELAS were now sticking like flies in honey.

Back in the spring of 1944 Greece became disturbed by propaganda being spread about an independent Macedonia. This was especially prevalent when the Party oriented itself towards a new direction and associated with SNOF.

It took SNOF six months of its existence to win over the rebels in Kostur Region and to swell its own ranks with more than 4,770 fighters. This can only mean that the Macedonians believed that: 'SNOF was a People's Liberation Organization which was going to meet the national and social demands of the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia. This was confirmed in the newspaper 'Slavo-Macedonian Voice' published in April 1944. It was rumoured that: 'SNOF was the new IMRO of the Macedonian people, which was going to bring the Ilinden work to its conclusion...'

This kind of news angered the Christian Turkish colonists and settlers in Greek occupied Macedonia, led by Captain Markos

Vafiadis who ordered the ELAS fighters to: ‘Destroy the rebels’. Vafiadis also said: ‘It is not enough to just destroy the rebels, we must also destroy their habitat and all those who took guns and their families who support them and all those who think of creating a United Macedonia.’

Vafiadis also said: ‘Now, like never before, we who came to these new lands and created a new life for ourselves here, with the help of the Greek government must deliver a powerful punch to make them understand that we are not colonists and we will not give up Greek Macedonia for some kind of United Macedonia.’

There were also colonists who called for a relentless struggle against the Macedonians saying: ‘Comrades! It is our duty to fight, to run them out of here or they will run us out back to Anatolia.’ But, as you know, it was clear to me that we did not want to fight for a United Macedonia. No one here amongst our people was prepared to fight for a United Macedonia, or to serve or be the slaves of the so-called ‘Slavo-Macedonian, whoever they may be. It was all a lie!

There were also those colonists who followed the Greek propaganda which told them that this (Macedonia) was paradise and that they (the colonists) had been brought here and given the best properties that were taken from the Turkish lords. ‘We invite you! Get drunk, people, and be merry, eat and drink well! Be happy and remain certain that you can preserve Greek Macedonia to remain Greek, because this is what’s important. Don’t wait until tomorrow; paradise is here for you today! This is exactly why the (Greek) government brought you here to this paradise from Anatolia, to grant you the properties taken from the Turkish agas.’

Johnny Stefov who had just arrived here from Canada a few days before said to me: ‘I listen to you talking and think to myself that we Macedonians are as small as we are sad, we are an unhappy, dependent and jealous people. We start out by encouraging and helping each other and talk about uniting. Then we begin to listen to strangers who do their best to put a wedge between us and divide us like they divided us into communists and rebels and made us fight one another. We fought each other because that’s what outsiders and strangers told us to do and we did it until we put ourselves to ruin,

until we disappeared. This tells me that smallness and greatness are only distinguished by our size as people and not as ambitious subjects.

People, this makes me so angry that I feel like yelling out loud so that the entire Balkans can hear me!’ That’s what Johnny Stefov said...” concluded Krapov as he stopped talking and, after a short pause as if organizing his thoughts, said:

“On June 18, 1943 the ‘Joint Headquarters’ was created and recognized the ‘resistance forces’ as a United Army headed by Eddie Myers.

The next day newspapers revealed that talks had taken place between EDES, ELAS and the British Chiefs of Staff for the Middle East, and that a CPG and an EAM delegation had arrived in Cairo in August 1943 to negotiate terms of unity and a joint headquarters with the Greek government in exile and with representatives of other civil and political parties. A joint headquarters was formed on June 18, 1943, which recognized the resistance forces as a United Army under the leadership of Eddie Myers. At this point the National Liberation Movement in Greece was subordinated to the English General for the Middle East. Following the same lines of thinking, the Lebanon protocol for joint military cooperation was also signed.

After SNOF completed its task of dissolving the rebel bands and swelling up its own ranks with rebels, which turned out to be a total manipulation and a perfect political and physical way of liquidating the Macedonians and eliminating them from the world political scene, practically accomplishing what the Greek government wanted to do for many years, the leadership of the Greek resistance (CPG, EAM and ELAS) decided SNOF was no longer needed. The elimination of SNOF was the price the Macedonian people had to pay in order for the Greek parties to achieve ‘national unity’. On May 20, 1944 the CPG signed the famous agreement of capitulation and thus sealed the fate of the Macedonian people.”

After Krapov stopped talking I was not clear about something so I asked him: “Is it true that SNOF was formed under pressure from Tempo’s Yugoslav Communist Party?”

He replied affirmatively and said: “Yes! The CPG gave its consent in order to attract those Macedonians who had refused to join the ranks of ELAS and EAM.” he then went on to tell me about more agreements that the CPG had entered into without Macedonian consent.

He said: “Another agreement between the CPG, EAM, ELAS, Papandreou’s Greek government in exile and the British headquarters for the Middle East was signed on September 26, 1944 in the Italian town Caserta. This agreement called for the transfer of command of all Greek guerrilla forces to the Greek government in exile. The Greek government then transferred control of all its forces to the English General Scobey.

This agreement unfortunately had unprecedented consequences for the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia. The absence of the rebels along with the absence of other Macedonian fighters, the Greek Rightists came right back and they began to conduct unprecedented terror against the Macedonian civilian population. They wanted to terrorize the Macedonian people in order to fully expel them outside of Greece’s borders.

According to the English ambassador in Athens, the English were in agreement with this.

The idea of displacing the Macedonian population outside of Greek occupied Macedonia was carried forward by Mr. P. L. Liper in November 1944, who then concluded that it was not possible at that time. Liper’s idea however was realized during the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) when around 50,000 Macedonians were expelled. Around 28,000 children were also taken away by DAG and by the Greek Queen. Those taken by DAG, as you know, were sent to various people’s democracies such as Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, the USSR and others.” concluded Krapov.

After a few moments of silence, Krapov looked at me with a serious look on his face and said: “After the rebels were liquidated, due to its policy of bargaining with the right, the CPG made a few decisions.

On July 16, 1943 ELAS Commander Sarafis and English Mission Military Chief Colonel Edie Mayers signed a joint declaration by which ELAS was recognized as an army and was subordinated to Middle East Command.

On February 12, 1945 the Varkiza Agreement was signed by the CPG and EAM, on one hand, and by the Plastiras government and British General Scobey on the other. With this agreement EAM and ELAS practically handed power to the right. This also meant that Greece would not be a socialist country.

Even though the Second World War ended, the Macedonian people still remained under the control and watchful eye of the CPY and the CPG even outside of their homeland.

It was an Easter morning in April 1944 when our lives began to turn for the worst. Here is what historian Apostol Goranov said:

‘What happened on that great Christian holiday was the arrival of the first and second National Brigade of Tito’s partisans from Vardar Macedonia - Yugoslavia who held a magnificent rally and speeches in the middle of the village Bapchor. Tito’s army, which consisted of Macedonians from Vardar Macedonia, crossed the Yugoslav border on Good Friday and rushed through the Voden, Lerin and Kostur Region villages with songs and gunfire. The villagers of Bapchor, along with representatives from the villages Turie, Trsie, Lagen and Prekopana on that Easter, after all the great speeches, sang all the songs of their ancestors, convinced that this, on this great Christian holiday in 1944, would bring them hope and optimism after Macedonia’s division in 1913.’ Other incidents also took place that morning but in the beginning it seemed like they were not connected to this event.

Giore Velkovski, representative of Tito’s Yugoslav partisan units, spoke at the rallies.

This was confirmed by Chakalaro (Naum Peiov) who one day said to me: ‘I have a need to tell you what I know, what I experienced in my lifetime, because I feel torn between the truth and the cruel political propaganda which, with the power of ideology, has skewed our reality of what really happened.’

Following the Easter morning event, a sinister turning point for us Macedonians, we took the first steps to what history would call an open conflict between ELAS and those now called ‘Tito’s agents’. After Giore Velkovski spoke, a few Macedonians, former members of ELAS and members of the CPG and EAM, fought for opening a minimal program; an ominous move seeking a fragmented solution to the Macedonian Question but with no mention of autonomy. The point brought up was nothing new, it was well-known and part of the entire neighbouring communist movement programs. I should also add that these same Communists who made this move were committed to all the communist movements (Yugoslavian, Greek and Bulgarian).

Those former ELAS fighters then asked to be reinstated as fighters and, supported by Tempo, decided to leave ELAS and join Tito’s army. They justified their actions by saying that they were angry at ELAS and its attitude towards the Macedonian issue and for not allowing the Macedonians to become self-determined. I remember Aristotle saying: ‘Anger is required and nothing can be won without it. Anger is needed to burn our hearts and souls, but it should not be used as a guide, but as a soldier.’

At one point Velkovski said: ‘Dear Macedonian brothers! We know that you don’t want to join the ranks of ELAS, or the Andartes, as some Greeks call them, because they remind you of Ilinden and after Ilinden when the Andartes committed great deeds of evil against the Macedonian people. It was a time when even a child in the cradle was afraid to cry.

We the Macedonians in Tito’s army invite you to join our ranks and fight for the liberation and unification of Macedonia! I want to advise you, dear villagers, that yesterday a large number of villagers

from Trsie, Lerin Region, voluntarily joined our units and became Tito's Partisans.'

But then something unpleasant happened when Anesti Popovski and myself, as translators from Macedonian to Greek, translated the above speech for the Greek officers in the 1st Battalion of the 28th Infantry Regiment. No one from ELAS was happy!

In fact the Political Commissar of the ELAS regiment went as far to say as: 'This is too much... for the National Liberation Movement of Yugoslavia to call upon the Slavo-Macedonians and citizens of Greece to join Tito's army in Yugoslavia. This is dangerous! This is the policy of Svetozar Vukmanovik - Tempo, who, since 1943, has been sent to Greece by Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia.'

The Political Commissar's words made me think. I knew that Tempo was accused of conducting a policy favouring a maximalist tendency towards Macedonian historical principles. We should also keep in mind that, behind this more recent propaganda about Tempo favouring Macedonian tendencies, the idea of 'Macedonian political and national emancipation' under communist rule died in 1941 when Metodija Shatorov – Sharlo was liquidated. As I mentioned earlier, Sharlo wanted to form a single communist party for all divided parts of Macedonia... in other words, a unified Macedonia. The CPY was against this... History has noted that the Greek communists were not the only ones who supported anti-Macedonian policies in the Balkans. Yugoslav emissary Tempo was also in support of anti-Macedonian policies.

I remember at the time an old man, all fueled with nationalistic sentiments, running up and hugging Giore Velkovski and saying: 'We can only unite in this way and be as we were hundreds of years ago. No one should collect young Macedonians and force them to participate in ELAS, now is the time to go to a Macedonian army...'

Velkovski then said: 'Yes, yes, you're right, old man...'

At that time I thought to myself: well... here is how the wheel of fate has suddenly turned... like it was going crazy...

When the rally ended we stood there among members of the General Headquarters for the two armies; ELAS and Tito's Partisans.

Moments later Naum Peiov - Chakalaro shyly approached Kiro Georgievski – Deian, a member of Tito's Army General Staff and asked him a question. He said: 'Comrade Deian, Comrade Giore Velkovski said that your position is to immediately include Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia in the ranks of NOV and PO of Yugoslavia. Does that apply to us active fighters who have been active in the ranks of ELAS for years?'

Deian looked at him and said: "This applies primarily to new fighters who have refused to fight in the ranks of ELAS because they did not trust the Greek resistance movement, which did not support the correct position on the Macedonian national question.'

Deian then went on to say: 'Our specific goal is to use the anti-fascist situation among our Macedonian people here and to conduct a wide mobilization of new volunteer fighters. But if you and members from the ranks of EAM and ELAS voluntarily want to transition to our ranks, we will accept you and in time we will inform Tempo,' concluded Krapov.

After pausing for a few moments, as if thinking what to say next, Krapov resumed speaking and said: "The Political Commissar of the Greek ELAS units then said: 'Those who turn their backs on ELAS turn their backs on their own people. Until now they were harassed because they refused to enter the ranks of ELAS and for the same reason they were called Bugaromani. They don't want to defend Greece's sovereignty and integrity and they want to defend Yugoslavia's? This is a very serious issue! But then they should know that there is a shameful end to every traitor, because one day they will be cast out by those who they serve today.'

After speaking to Deian, Chakalaro came over towards me and looking puzzled he said: 'Am I thinking straight? This is no good, undeniably the news for going to Tito's army will leave a mark on all of us... But at the same time quite naturally, along with a sense

of joy, will grow the grief in leaving our families, our homes and what our forefathers have earned and kept for us. We are happy with the open truth in that ‘fraternal’ statement... Those who are not afraid to tell the truth, no matter how bitter it is, are strong. Only the weak lie in such moments.’

‘Naum, Naum’, I said to him, ‘let us consider this soberly. We may disagree on a lot of things, but I truly don’t understand where our consciousness is. It seems to me like you’re in conflict with yourself. I don’t understand how those who want to go to Tito’s army can love this part of Macedonia more than the rest of us who want to stay here. I don’t understand how a person can fight more for the affirmation of Macedonia from the outside than a person in Kostur, Lerin and Voden Regions, exactly where they were born. It is our primordial right to defend our fatherland and the hearth of our grandfathers. Only yesterday we called on the rebels to come to us and they believed and trusted us and joined our ranks, but don’t forget that we sinned against them, sins that our people will never forget.

I came to believe that we Macedonians had no understanding of what it meant to go to a foreign country. Worse than that was that we hoped and trusted that Tito, out of the goodness of his heart, was going to free us. Our actions truly defied logic. We came to believe that the Communists in Greece could do absolutely nothing to help us and at the same time we came to believe that the Yugoslav communists were invincible and that we should place our fate fully in their hands. I can tell you that no wise man would ever put himself in such a situation.

I came to believe that those who left their homeland would become different people and would never be able to return home, even if circumstances allowed them to return. I also often wondered if an outsider, a stranger can be a master or a leader of his own people? So, how were these people going to expand and fully implement Yugoslav policies here? Unfortunately we Macedonians in the ranks of the CPG did not do much thinking for ourselves. We did nothing to protect the Macedonian rebels because we did not want to offend our current ‘brothers’ and occupiers. Our current ‘brothers’ and occupiers did not raise a hand against the Macedonian rebels

because we were more than willing to do it for them. We were glad to fulfill their orders and to listen to the advice of ELAS and Tempo. And believe me, ever since then I have lived like a servant with much suppressed anger.

Every one of us should be asking ourselves: Why and from what do we suffer? We suffer because we continue to make the same mistakes. We seem to follow the same line which leads us to the same fatal conclusion. We trust strangers more than we trust ourselves. We place more faith in strangers than we place in our own people. We believed the Macedonian rebels were fighting for foreign interests because that is what the strangers told us. We never stopped, even for a moment, to ask ourselves; how can the rebels be fighting for 'foreign interests' when they were fighting to protect their own families and homes? They were Macedonians fighting for Macedonians, fighting for themselves! What more can I tell you?

There is one universal law that holds true every time: people, no matter who they are, fight for their own interests no matter what they tell you. No one would be willing to stick their neck out for your interests when you are fighting against theirs. The Greeks were fighting for their interests when they asked us to liquidate the rebels. To get us to do it they told us that the rebels were fighting for 'Bulgarian interests' and naturally we believed them. But not for a moment did we stop to think what we were doing and for whose interests we were fighting when we attacked the rebels; our own people. Now the Yugoslavs are taking advantage of our naïveté and they too are manipulating us.

No matter how we Macedonians view the world, internationally Yugoslavia is a different country than Greece. Our people going to Tito's army means they are going to join the army of another country and to fight for another country's interests. In Yugoslavia they will be sent to fight at the Srem front where Tito will decide where they are needed. Now think about this and tell me: how will this help the families of the fighters in Greek occupied Macedonia, leaving their homes? It won't! Our struggle should take place here and should be about defending our families and homes. Our struggle should never be about ideologies, religion, etc., things that are controlled by outsiders and things that divide us. We are all

Macedonians and our common interest is Macedonia, we have a common origin and that's what we should be fighting for. We alienate ourselves from ourselves when we listen to foreigners, especially to our current occupiers, telling us what's good for us. Look what this has done to us. We have become willing hostages of the Greeks and the Yugoslavs who will turn us into enemies of one another just like they turned us against the rebels. This will be yet another historical divide of our people. Think about it,' I said!

Chakalaro stood there looking confused and pensive. He listened to me with disbelief. He struggled to maintain a normal expression on his face when he said: 'This present call for a lot of us Macedonians will have many unclear things. Perhaps the CPY and the CPG are deliberately doing this to keep our people afraid and obedient and this obedience is what is killing us as a nation. They work against the Macedonians through their ideologies and know how to defeat us without firing a single bullet. They know how to humiliate, disparage and intimidate us as a nation...

They call on the Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia for an all out general mobilization of the new fighters, and to us the first fighters and members of EAM and the CPG in the ranks of ELAS, they say if we want? Let me tell you that the views of the Greek communist movement are becoming increasingly unacceptable. We have seen how they subordinated us to the Unified English Army under Middle East Command. No one asked us Macedonians, SNOF, if we wanted to serve in the Unified English Army under English command. Especially since I know we are in favour of the Red Army.'

When he stopped talking I looked at Chakalaro and said: 'It is time for us to stop kidding ourselves as to how this evil began. Let me ask you this: What do you think of Tempo's idea of starting a Balkan Headquarters and do you think this has played an important ideological role in the timing and opening a new historical process in Macedonia, especially in Greek occupied Macedonia?'

Chakalaro looked at me strangely and said: 'Tempo knew very well, just like the Greeks know very well, that we the authentic

Macedonians have a vision and a strategy for the historical processes for the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia.

As for the idea of creating a Balkan Headquarters, the Greeks estimate that it was a political move... similar to a move a man makes when running barefoot through thorns. Don't you think Tempo knows that ELAS is already under English command in the Middle East Army?

By now we should all know that in May the EAM and ELAS leaderships signed an agreement with the Greek government in exile, located in Cairo, headed by Georgios Papandreou. The goal of the agreement was to form a joint government, to create national unity. But the worst part about this agreement was that it called for the liquidation of all Macedonian organizations including SNOF and for us Macedonians to join EAM. In other words the aim of creating SNOF was to destroy the Macedonian rebels and to start new hatred between us Macedonians. I remember having a meeting with Markos Vafiadis, Kapetanios in charge of a group of divisions in Macedonia (Northern Greece), who I personally begged for more than three hours to look at the problem of recruiting new Macedonian fighters and putting them in the Macedonian units because many villagers refused to fight for ELAS.

And do you know what Vafiadis said to me? He said that we were not allowed to have more units than allocated to us. Not a single unit more, not one and to correct the existing problem we now need to send you to the ranks of ELAS as soon as possible. You need to go to ELAS now as regular soldiers. We cannot have a separate Macedonian army and lie to the people here of Greece! I swear to you that's what he said!

Chakaloro then looked at me and said: 'EAM sold us out and now they are out there agitating the Macedonian people with empty words and pure lies. Every Macedonian should be asking themselves: What will become of us if they restore the old Greek regime in Greece? For years we fought and spilled our blood to bring progress and to advance human relations in the Balkans, not to bring back old Greece. But as the years passed EAM and CPG policies changed to keep pace with current events. All they wanted

out of us Macedonians was to turn us into party mules and tie us up with two or three ropes whose lengths they controlled.

It should be clear to every Macedonian by now that the Greeks did exactly that by creating SNOF and the Macedonian units. Their aim was to have us destroy the Macedonian rebels and create a divide between our people. They didn't want to dirty their hands so they had us do their dirty work, and we did. We did because we unquestionably trusted the communists. We believed that revolutions were started to bring change for the better and were convinced that we would not only break the fascist yoke but we would also release ourselves from the Greek yoke.

But the thing that's most essential for us now, throughout the course of the negotiations between PEEA (Political Committee of National Liberation of Greece) and the Greek government in exile, is not even mentioned. There is no mention of Macedonians or the rights of the Macedonians or of any minorities living in Greece in any of the documents being signed. This says a lot about where the CPG and ELAS stand in regards to the Macedonians. In fact the CPG and ELAS work against us Macedonians on a daily basis by agitating for the Greek character of Macedonia.'

I looked at Chakalaro in the eye and said: 'Those who joined the ranks of Tito's army are not traitors. And neither are those who will leave the ranks of ELAS, but I do know that their actions will bring us great harm. A man abandoning fierce injustice is not treason, but at the same time we Macedonians need to be careful and act wisely. Both sides want to divide us and create a bitter situation between us. Also, we will never find justice outside of our birthplace among strangers.'

While responding to Chakalaro I was reminded of an old folk saying that went something like this: 'The soil belongs to no one, but we belong to the soil'.

One would need to have much sense to understand the profound philosophical meaning of that saying. I know from many years of experience, if a person leaves his own soil then he no longer belongs to it."

Krapov was smiling now and his smile was free, seeming like he had nothing to hide. During our conversation his facial features were in constant motion. The wrinkles on his forehead were moving up and down as his facial expressions changed from serious to jovial and back to serious again.

After pausing for a moment Krapov smiled and began to talk again. He said: "I unexpectedly believed that a miracle was going to take place. Only a few Macedonian ELAS fighters remained and most of those who remained secretly disappeared and went somewhere.

One morning one of those fighters who remained, and who at the time was in a bad mood, said to me: 'I don't want any of the Greeks to know what I am about to tell you because my throat may be cut. But, those from our side (the Macedonian fighters in ELAS who left) were whispering all night and then they were gone in the morning before dawn. They slithered their way out like shadows. They were led by Chakalaro and his friends Nikola Shalvarinov, Dimitar Shishkovski and Sotir Andonovski. I overheard they left so that they can inform the fighters in the Lazo Trpovski detachment of what was happening and then travel to the Vicho unit and prepare to join Tito's army in Yugoslavia.'

Listening to the man speak I thought to myself: 'It is difficult to manage things when you are impulsive'. I could see that in Paiov yesterday. Even though he gave the impression that he knew what he was doing and that he was in control of things, he went ahead and did this anyway. He couldn't even manage his own impulses, how was he going to manage guiding and leading our people, especially in times like these?

Then I remembered what my grandfather Delian used to say: 'People who are impulsive fantasize about being inspiring, but there is nothing strong underneath that, everything that is done is without foundation and quickly crumbles'. My grandfather was right. Look what we have done. We created nothing for ourselves but were more than anxious to join organizations created for us by others, outsiders

and our enemies no less. We voluntarily joined EAM, ELAS and the CPG and now we are full of anger, but anger does nothing. This shows that our actions have eluded our future, especially our inability to create something of ours.

The next day we learned that they arrived at SNOF Headquarters in Krchishta, Kostur Region and met with Lazo Dimovski - Oshenski, Lazo Pop Lazarov and Pascal Mitrevski. Almost everyone who managed SNOF and led the Lazo Trpovski detachment was there.

After entering the large classroom in the village school, they all sat down except for Chakalaro. Believing that he deserved to be more privileged than others and expecting special attention, he stood up straight like a soldier and said: 'Comrades, yesterday we attended a meeting in the village Bapchor where we were told by a representative of Tito's army that all Macedonians from this side of Macedonia (Greek occupied Macedonia) who have not yet joined ELAS, who want to fight for the liberation and unification of Macedonia, can do so now by joining the ranks of Tito's army. Similarly, those who are now in the ranks of ELAS can also join Tito's army'.

After hearing this, the first question that came to mind was: 'How can we do that if we are currently in the ranks of ELAS and volunteered to be there?' In any case, I thought about it for a while and decided that I was going to leave ELAS and join Tito's army so that I could fight on the side of the Red Army. I was under the impression that ELAS could no longer dictate its terms to us.

Back in Krchishta those in attendance were in disbelief and remained motionless. They were looking at each other wondering what was going on. There was total silence as if they were in a church during prayer.

The silence unfortunately did not last long before arguments erupted and lasted for three days. Three days of discussions and yelling at one another.

At one point Chakalaro was heard yelling: 'Enough already, I am sick and tired of hearing the words now is not the time for that! I

don't have any other time other than the time of my youth which I have lost. As a Macedonian I don't want to fight in a unified army under English command!

Another person in attendance was heard saying: 'For an independent Macedonia... from a long time ago it has been a mistake...' but then he abruptly stopped talking.

Chakaloro quickly jumped in and said: 'So, you have given up on our revolutionary ideals?! If a nation is not and does not want to be independent, will there be anyone who would want to give their life for a foreign country? Let me also ask you this; Do we still want a Macedonia or not?!'

Those in attendance looked at each other somewhat confused as if they did not understand what Chakaloro was asking.

Impatient to hear what they had to say Chakaloro yelled out: 'Answer my question! What are your thoughts?'

Chakaloro's performance, by most, was interpreted as a daring move with political connotations, root changing connotations that would completely change the root of the Macedonian people's struggle. There was a pause as everyone kept quiet, but Mitrevski, having the need to be in the centre of attention, stepped up and said:

'After all, the rationale is clear but we should not be igniting the fire. You Chakaloro are you sure of that? This suggests something else; not to exasperate ourselves with small and petty things. I see you're sad; did someone use this situation to cause you grief? All of us here willingly fought for ELAS and accepted the minimum of the program, and now? This is something completely different. If we join Tito's army we will be fighting for the maximum of the program and that is a united Macedonia. All these years we fought in the ranks of ELAS and this whole time we supported the Party Line. We fought the Party's enemies and defended the Party's authority and what did the CPG teach us? It taught us to fight each other by starting an internal partisan struggle.

Perhaps I should not be talking about things like this... secrets... everything we talked about here is secret, I think we should be very careful...’

Attempting to smile, Chakalaro’s face distorted and he blurted: ‘Are you confessing something?’

Anxiously Pop – Lazarov, opting not to repeat the same question, murmured something through his teeth and then asked: ‘... is this the reason why we are leaving our country?’ He wanted to say more, something else, but was silenced by Mitrevski.

‘You Pop – Lazarov, bite your tongue. I am president here and you should know that I alone am responsible for the revolution!’ said Mitrevski.

‘Okay then...!’ replied Pop – Lazarov.

Mitrevski tried to smile and, while still talking to Pop – Lazarov, said: ‘Well, if you can’t keep quiet then at least say something that we Macedonians should expect in the future in a united Macedonia? You, as the visionary that you are...’

‘Well, what do you want me to say... expect the worst?!’ said Pop – Lazarov. Mitrevski was known to be envious of those who had more insight than himself.

Mitrevski then turned to Oshenski and said: ‘And you Oshenski, as an old ideologue of the Party, what do you have to say?’

‘What to do? So far the situation has been very difficult,’ said Lazo Damovski - Oshenski with a sour look on his face and then continued: ‘We Macedonians entered the ranks of the EAM and the CPG, and now ELAS without thinking. We were led by blind faith in communist ideas. Now we are not in a good situation...’

Chakalaro jumped in and asked Oshenski: ‘Are you sure you are not hiding something from me? I’ve had enough of this endeavour to circumvent things.’

Oshenski looked at him sternly and said: 'I am a socialist and a revolutionary and I always tell our Greek friends that our wish, the desire of the Macedonian people in Aegean Macedonia, is to have a United and Free Macedonia, according to the principles of the Atlantic Charter (5) and according to what Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill promised us... Our common Struggle, Macedonians and Greeks fighting together, will help pave the way to unite the Macedonian people in a free Macedonia, and the Greek people in achieving true democracy, eject the foreign yoke and pave the way for a better government in Greece.

But I also remember what a Greek communist, a friend of mine from the Akronaphlion Prison one time said to me. He said: Yes, yes I know that among you Macedonians there are talented people, who are not given what's due to them. I am a true rebel and I believe that you Macedonians are justified in seeking as much as possible. But if you allow me, I will tell you something that you may not have thought of. You as Macedonian communists agreed to the idea of accepting the colonists from Asia Minor and as a result you have changed your ethnic composition and you Macedonians have become a minority in your own native lands. Those Asia Minor colonists have now entered senior Party functions. Is that not correct? Now, as Communists, you need to ask these people if they want to be in a united Macedonia. At this moment we are fighting to expel the Germans. Europe has not yet been rearranged, and here in Greece we have trouble with the nationalists, and now with the colonists, and, while I am all for equality and perhaps for social equality for you Macedonians, now is not the time for that. The time for that is somewhere in the future, as you can see now is not the right time. I hope you can see that? he said.

That's all I wanted to tell you...' concluded Oshenski.

After three days of yelling, arguing, discussing and criticizing the Greek Party's policies, the exhaustive talks finally ended. Not completely sure of Peiov's proposal, they asked for clarification from NOV and PO Yugoslav headquarters then located in the village Sulin, Prespa Region in Yugoslavia.

Mitrevski and Oshenski proposed that Chakalaro take a few of the men who had taken part in the discussions to accompany a courier and go to the Headquarters in the village Sulin. Their task was to obtain clarification on the issue of how to voluntarily switch sides while still being active in the armed ranks of Macedonians in ELAS. But, according to village tradition in Koreshtata, they were not allowed to leave for a journey before sunrise. Unfortunately they felt that tradition did not apply to them and decided to leave immediately. Included amongst those who left were Naum Peiov - Chakalaro, Nikola Shalvarinov, Spiro Lazevski, Risto Iankulovski, Blagoi Dimitrov and Kicha Baleva.

When they arrived at the Headquarters they met with Deian who told them: 'In my opinion you acted entirely properly. If you want my opinion I can tell you that you acted very patriotically.'

Deian then went on to say: 'We will take you into our ranks because you are unwilling to fight with us. But I also want you to let you know that there are people in the CPY that don't share this view. The most important thing for us is our national feeling and, from what I see, you share the same feeling. But there are also those who place Internationalism over nationalism, and nationalism, they say, is inappropriate for real communists. Unfortunately none of the neighbouring communist parties are willing to accept us; not Yugoslavia, not Greece and not Bulgaria. The Macedonian people have many unresolved problems. We are a special people and not part of anyone else and therefore our unification, after Macedonia's division following the Balkan Wars, will be difficult, but today we are here to fight against fascism and without a clear purpose as to what will happen to our people in the three parts of Macedonia in the future.'

You know that the Communist Party of Macedonia, formed in 1941, did not achieve its aims because it was quickly decapitated and placed under the CPY's strict control. After Macedonia's partition a strange phenomenon took place in our country, our solidarity was taken away from us by our conquerors and we were forced to contribute more to their interests than to ours, except for the rebels

in Kostur (1943 – 1944) but then we liquidated them as ordered by ELAS.

If you understand what I am saying then do what you think is best for you...' concluded Deian.

The next day, after meeting with Deian, Chakalaro felt like he was a special and unique person because he felt only a few people would even understand what Deian was saying. Chakalaro felt that what was about to happen would have historical significance. After that Chakalaro and the group returned to Koreshtata to prepare those Macedonians who wanted to join Tito's army. But, as it turned out, things did not go the way they were expected.

No sooner had Chakalaro and the others left than the leadership of ELAS General Headquarters sent a stern letter to the Yugoslav Partisan General Headquarters demanding the return of all ELAS deserters led by Chakalaro.

When Markos found out he became furious, especially since he already hated Macedonians. He then immediately informed Headquarters to prepare elite units and hunt them down and capture the traitors.

At one point Markos said: 'I chased after them and hunted them down in the same way I hunted down the Germans. It was a very serious issue. They could have risen against us within our ranks and we would have had large losses.'

To save himself and his unit Chakalaro fled and took shelter on Mount Vrba where he spent the rest of the short summer. Free from aggression and from ELAS persecution, Chakalaro and his partisans enjoyed the fresh mountain air and occasionally feasted on roasted lamb. Then one morning they heard news on the radio about their desertion. They were referred to as ELAS deserters led by Peiov who fled to Tito's army. The worst part about this news was that it was repeated again and again every five or so minutes; the same hoarse monotonous voice saying the same thing over and over again, repeating:

‘We are asking all residents of the Kostur villages to be on the lookout for the deserters led by Paiov, if you happen to see them report them to the EAM or ELAS authorities!’

While repeating the message about the deserters, the radio program also broadcast a message from a Serbian political adviser named Dobrovoie Radosavlievich – Ortse working inside the federal government of Macedonia. In the radio message Ortse addressed the Yugoslav political workers and NOV units which had crossed into Greek territory and advised them that the EAM and ELAS had taken measures to eliminate all unhealthy measures that recently appeared in Kostur and Lerin Regions, mainly the desertion of ELAS fighter units, which he said were bound to inflict damage and harm to relations and to the common struggles between the People’s Liberation Army, ELAS and Yugoslavia. Ortse announced that measures had already been taken to correct the errors made on the Yugoslav side and on the side of ELAS.

The broadcaster also said that the authorities had to punish all offenders and those responsible for the offenses because they violated fraternal relations between Yugoslavia’s NOV and ELAS.

July 7th, 1944.

Spheres of influence were established in the Balkans. Great Britain gained supremacy over Greece and the Soviet Union over Romania.

On May 20th, 1944 in Lebanon, under pressure from the British, the CPG, EAM and ELAS signed an Agreement with the Royalist Government in Greece. After that the coalition government was dissolved.

The Communists in Macedonia held a conference on June 25, 1944 and unanimously agreed to cancel the Lebanon Agreement calling for NOD (People’s Liberation Movement) to switch to revolutionary tactics supported by its own forces and by NOV of Yugoslavia. The CPG leadership became split over the issue. One group wanted to accept the Agreement and the other to reject it.

The group which advocated for acceptance of the Agreement prevailed. After this the Soviet side dispatched a military Mission headed by Colonel Gregory Popov which arrived in the free territory on June 28, 1944. Popov was part of the Soviet establishment and was well aware of Stalin's totalitarian system and the means by which it operated as a one party dictatorship in Russia and in all the communist countries all over the world, liquidating all other factions and leaving only those who were totally committed to follow the Comintern in Moscow. Stalin wanted Moscow to be the absolute centre of all communist parties.

And thus Soviet citizen Gregory Popov, now a high ranking plenipotentiary in the Soviet Party, had only this to say: 'Here is the directive... This is what Stalin wants!'

On August 17, 1944 the CPG Central Committee decided to accept the Agreement and take part in the coalition government headed by Georgios Papandreou.

At the same meeting Stringos, a Politburo member and member of the CPG Central Committee, added: 'The Central Committee is again warning Gotse and Peiov that no good will come out of the position they have taken and their behaviour. We want to ask the Slavo-Macedonians one more time to return to the Party ranks and by doing so to save their lives. If they don't, then they can go to hell...' Stringos's remarks were followed with great applause.

August 2nd, 1944.

In early dawn the wind was wafting over the lake making vivid sounds. That year ELAS and all our enemies trampled over Kostur and Kostur Region..."

Krapov suddenly became quiet. His gaze became fixed on the top of Mount Vicho as if wanting to let me know that this was the place where the evil had started. Then, as quickly as he had stopped talking, he turned his head towards me, gave me a great big smile and began talking again... like all these had things happened yesterday.

He said: “That night all the people in every household spoke about the Greeks. Many of the older villagers remembered the dark days of the Andartes; the slaughter, the looting, the frightening things that happened when the Greek Andartes, headed by Pavlos Melas and Germanos Karavangelis, came here in 1904 and began to torment us. There were some really angry people amongst the Andartes, especially the Cretans. They tormented us something awful even though we had done nothing to them and were still under Ottoman rule.

Melas’s obituary read: ‘He heroically died on October 18, 1904 in the village Statitsa, Kostur Region’. His last words were: ‘No Bulgarian shall be left alive!’ Unlike Karavitas who said: ‘We don’t need the Macedonians, we need Macedonia!’”

Krapov stopped talking again, but only for a moment. He then looked at me with a friendly look on his face and suddenly, in a loud voice, said: “Sometimes life can splash a story that is more exciting than a movie. I often go back to that painful period from half a century ago not only to remind myself of what happened but also to connect with those times, with that deeply anti-Macedonian era marked with blood and tears.

The situation in this part of our world was one vicious circle. Forty or so years later the Andartes were back. Forty years later the descendants of the Ilinden fighters met up with the descendents of the Greek Andartes. But now Macedonia was occupied by Greece and the population had changed. Now we had Turkish refugees and settlers from Asia Minor occupying our lands. They were brought here by the Greek state in the early 1920’s (1918-1924) and to please them they were given our most fertile lands, largest estates and best pastures and they were slowly turned into our masters.

This reminds me of what Johnny once said to me. He said: ‘Look, we Macedonians have so many different masters that we no longer know who they are. Whoever comes here we welcome them with open arms, smile at them and bow to them and say kalos oriste (welcome)’.

The Andartes and the newcomers are now involved with ELAS and have turned against us. We have been kind to them all these years and they have turned against us. Everywhere you look there are murders, torment and burned homes. These people are angry and have restless souls and all they want is to destroy us. The descendants of the Andartes and the newcomers are now the new evil that has befallen us and their greatest desire is to exterminate us.”

Krapov went silent again, but only for a moment, seeming like he wanted to get his thoughts in order. He then said: “When, during the German occupation, the Greek government left Greek occupied Macedonia and Greece and went to Cairo, we Macedonians thought that we were liberated from its cruelty. But it was not like that. Greek officers quickly began to collaborate with the Germans and remained in control. The Greek police also returned and began to again torment the Macedonian people by telling the Germans that they were communists. You could say that the Macedonian people lost complete confidence in everything Greek. The older Macedonians used to say: ‘After Macedonia was divided three types of patriotism came into the mix. We all bowed our heads down and replaced our Turkish slavery with a Greek one but at the same time we hoped that because the Greeks were Christians they would treat us better... But we were wrong...’ Then when we asked these old people why they tolerated Greek slavery they would say: ‘This is our homeland from time immemorial, this too will pass and the Greeks will leave like the Turks did!’

This again reminded me of what Johnny said to me one time. He said: ‘I remember my grandparents telling me about their life and struggle under the Turks and when I asked why they had to struggle my grandmother said: ‘We struggled to be Christian, to be alive... unfortunately we Macedonians have been cursed by God to suffer and to serve strangers, some of us becoming Turks, some becoming Greeks while others became Bulgarians’...”

When Krapov stopped talking I took the opportunity to say something that was on my mind. I said: “Krsto, I don’t know if you know this but those Macedonians in ELAS, the sheep from Kostur,

Lerin and Voden Regions, were frozen in fear. When a big uproar surfaced in the region not one of them was able to explain the atrocious disposition to the villagers. It was scary and word spread quickly when someone came face to face with the Andartes and recognized someone they knew and remembered from Metaxas's time before the 1940's. The small groups of Andartes were composed of former Greek army officers, Greek police chiefs and gendarmes from the overthrown Greek authorities. They now enjoyed a new way of punishing people by cutting off their head. It was called 'death in seclusion' (kill the plowman in the field and leave the oxen in the harness to wander around and drag the plowman's body over the freshly plowed soil).

The Greek government justified this by saying: 'From time to time fear is needed to help those who can't be helped by reason to get the message that getting angry is not useful'.

One thing was true. These crimes were committed particularly against the Ilinden fighters. The rebels were freedom fighters who fought against Turkish slavery, and now in the forties they were fighting against Greek slavery."

Krapov looked at me with a curious look on his face and said: "The attacks started small and gradually grew larger. The attackers were targeting prominent Macedonian families wanting to rob them of their dignity and to degrade them. They used words like 'come out you Ilinden dogs' when they were calling them to come out of their homes. As these attacks continued to escalate Macedonians were faced with a dilemma; give in to the CPG and EAM or stay home and fight alone to protect themselves and their rights.

We Macedonians are characterized by our deep local patriotism. The village is an entity just like the family whose existence had to be preserved and jealously guarded. This confidence and local loyalty was a natural consequence of our historic experience. We carry a deep innate sense, namely we are loyal to the spirit of Macedonia.

Meetings were organized in the cities Lerin and Voden where there too the descendants of the Ilinden Uprising decided to arm and

defend themselves against all kinds of criminals. We felt like ‘the days of slavery in Macedonia were over’.

At that time the majority of the people were joining the Macedonian rebel movement so ELAS was quick to react by labeling the Macedonian rebels ‘Fascists’, ‘traitors’, ‘Bulgarophils’ and everything negative and evil they could think of. ELAS then publicly organized rallies, gave political speeches and spoke to people to convince them not to join the rebel movement. Those who refused ELAS were beaten and their houses and shops were smashed. The rebels had no choice but to raise their arms up in disbelief and invite the people to join their movement in order to defend themselves. The rebels chanted through the streets yelling ‘Brothers let us unite! Brothers unite! Macedonian people how long are you going to suffer! It is our primordial right to defend our fatherland, our place of birth, the hearth of our people. Do not run away’. God knows we suffered for five hundred years under Ottoman rule and now the Greeks brought the colonists and settlers from Turkey who are a hundred times worse. God you gave us a soul but we have become soulless. Why must we suffer so much? Why must we bleed so much of our Macedonian blood!? And now that we are exhausted we can see for ourselves there is no justice. Only the prisons are filled with honest villagers from Kostur Region.

The old people used to say this can’t be good. Shortly afterwards the rebels were armed with Italian Malihari and were able to defend the villages from outsiders. They also took care of some of the local troublemakers who felt it was their right to snatch a woman or a girl here and there. Slowly the rebels brought life and happiness back to the countryside. Unfortunately, as things progressed, the rebels also became a curse for the people as the struggle intensified and turned into a struggle for life or death. After that the Macedonian people who freely and proudly walked the streets began to gather in large guest rooms and continued to sing Macedonian songs and dance Macedonian dances.

There was talk about the Madzhiri (Turkish colonists and settlers from Asia Minor) envying our songs and dances, saying that they were jealous and that was one of the reasons why they were urging their leaders to form a large army and drive us all out of our

homeland. They truly wanted to rob us of everything..." concluded Krapov and suddenly went silent as he looked down at the ground.

"If you told someone that Macedonians were being used to divide themselves into two camps and that one camp hated the other and vice versa, they would have told you that's impossible," I said to Krapov.

I then said: "The divided Macedonians then called themselves communists and rebels. The rebels called the communists 'Greek Andartes' and the communists called the rebels 'Bulgarophils'.

They were broken people with a broken backbone. A huge number of Ilinden followers were molded into becoming obedient CPG members. These people were all humble rebels from good Macedonian families but then they fell prey to strangers who turned them against each other...

It almost seems like hatred in us is inherited and passed on from generation to generation - even when we become wanderers. The blood that we spilled during that time was not for us, it was for the high officials and cronies who wanted to remain in power. We Macedonians were psychologically separated from one another; we couldn't even marry a girl from a family on the opposite side.

In the years after Macedonia was divided we Macedonians, it seems, learned to manipulate the power of speech and the power of silence..."

Krapov looked at me sternly and said: "Allow me to tell you a little secret. It was Greek and English cleverness that divided the Macedonian population in Greek occupied Macedonia during the Second World War and turned it into a hostage of foreign megalomaniac interests and objectives.

a) EAM supporters organized SNOF. After SNOF was liquidated these same supporters showed great sympathy for the Yugoslav partisans. SNOF was essentially created to appeal to the radical

elements in the Macedonian leadership, who had tight contact with Vardar Macedonia, and

b) The villages that accepted weapons from the Italians, locally known as rebel villages, were very much aware of Pan-Slavism; a very real concept to the Macedonian population in that region.

And thus members of SNOF were allowed to enter the rebel villages and were convinced that they could persuade the rebels to join SNOB, the military wing of SNOF. Tito's partisans too were allowed to enter rebels villages, and quite freely, because of Tito's liberal attitude towards the Macedonians. ELAS Macedonian units, on the other hand, for as long as it led a strictly nationalistic policy, were always commanded by Greeks. There was always fear of a Macedonian insurrection and the Greeks were always prepared to quell it. Some Macedonians calling for the return of Solun surely must have caused outrage amongst many Greeks. The result would ultimately have been a bloody war from which nothing good could have come out.

There was also great criticism handed down by the CPG Regional Secretaries of Macedonia – Northern Greece at the CPG Central Committee Plenum. These criticisms were all about the formation of the Kostur Rebel Bands and how these enemies of the Greek people were allowed to escape their control. Greece likes to keep tight control of the Macedonians but given that the region was occupied, according to Greek accounts, 'the Macedonians allegedly 'used the moment to arm themselves' and realize their filthy purposes'. The Greeks also alleged that 'the Macedonian people in that region 'connected' much better with the alien occupiers and become much closer to them than they did to us communists. They see us communists as the enemy of the Slav-Macedonian nation and the Slavic world'. The news about this even reached the top of the Kremlin.

'Now our task as a Party is to be vigilant, to give them our attention and to show them that we care, because if we don't we could create a world problem out of nothing'.

Slavo-Macedonian communists, sons of well-known anti-Macedonian fighters and good loyal patriotic Greeks, were invited to mingle with the top Greek communist leadership at the Plenum and were told: ‘Okay, let the rebels carry on with their hopes, we have the Slavo-Macedonians who are loyal to the Party and to the ranks of ELAS. You are now exclusively responsible for the tasks that we are about to give you and you and the Slavo-Macedonians in the ranks of ELAS are to carry them out to their fullest.’

When they attended a counseling session with Markos Vafiadis and the Party Secretary they came to the following agreement:

- a) The Slavo-Macedonians are given the right to form Slavo-Macedonian army units from within the ELAS structure.
- b) The Slavo-Macedonians who are members of EAM are allowed to form their own organization to which they shall belong exclusively. Their organization shall be called SNOF (Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front).

The Greek communists created this process to initiate the liquidation of the Macedonian rebel bands and to fight against all enemies including everyone who wanted a ‘United Macedonia’. And thus began the downhill slide of Macedonian fighting against Macedonian.

The lies worked well because in no time the Kostur village rebels disappeared. One day they were gathered in a camp on Mount Vicho and held captive. They were tormented. Some had scratches on their faces, some were bandaged and many had wounds with dried blood on them and no one seemed to know why. Some were stripped down to their underwear, others were barefoot and of course everyone was hungry and frightened. They were all afraid to say anything or to do anything because they knew there was a knife waiting for them. The Andartes carried big knives and they did not hesitate to use them. Rebels were disappearing day and night. Three hundred rebels were killed in group executions and hundreds more were hunted down in the mountains like animals. ELAS executioners were ordered to shoot the rebels in the head to be sure they were dead. Some,

however, survived to tell their stories. They survived by hiding under the dead bodies of their comrades.

There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that these Greek lies caused much anger and that anger was directed against us – Macedonians hating Macedonians. Outside of setting the bait to liquidate the rebels, these lies were also responsible for killing all hopes and dreams of achieving a United Macedonia.

A radiograph marked EP 162 Paiak was sent by Hristos Moshos to a group of ELAS divisions in Greek occupied Macedonia, which reported the ELAS desertions and the Voden Battalion crossing the Greek-Yugoslav border into the Vardar part of Macedonia. Among other things the radiograph said:

‘EP 162 Paiak, very urgent

To: ELAS group of divisions from Macedonia.

On October 14, 1944 the Slav-Macedonian partisans unit, Voden Battalion of Kaimakchalan, fled to Serbia (Vardar Macedonia) without our knowledge. We sent a delegation to Serbian Macedonia to negotiate its return. We believe it was seduced by Macedonian Partisan staff.

October 17, 1944.
Petros (Hristos Moshos)’

In mid-September 1944, the Macedonian political and military leadership (from Vardar Macedonia) took serious measures to liberate and unify Macedonia in accordance with the First Sitting of ASNOM.

On September 23, 1944, NOV and POM General Headquarters sent directives to the commanders of the Lerin, Kostur and Voden battalions with the following orders:

‘Conduct a wide recruitment of fighters from among the Macedonian population. They will receive armaments, ammunition and other military materials from NOV and POM General

Headquarters. Prepare for operations against the Germans in the Aegean part of Macedonia and Greece in which NOV and POM units will also participate.’

After several days of recruitment, the Lerin - Kostur battalion swelled up to 1,500 soldiers and officers, and the Voden battalion grew to 575 soldiers and officers. But at the same time, fearing that all these Macedonian battalions would attack Solun, the CPG and ELAS tried to disband them. The Greek communists alleged that they had information that the battalions were preparing to attack Solun.

Because of this CPG and CPY relations were again strained. On October 4, 1944 Svetozar Vukmanovik - Tempo informed the top military leadership and POJ that the Macedonian units within ELAS refused to disband and that they wanted to shift to the Vardar part of Macedonia. During the nights of October 4 and 5, and October 14, the battalions transferred over to Vardar Macedonia.

And how did ELAS react to this? Let me tell you that the ‘Vicho’ squad commissar sat there bloated and silent. It seemed like poison was running through his veins and he felt hatred like he had never felt before. This person was a loner, cruel and bull-headed. He never had any sympathy for anyone and looked like he had a dark side to him. He kept his mouth shut but constantly moved his lips. He looked at me with a sharp look and said: ‘Captain Markos will retaliate and if he catches them he will liquidate them all. They deserve to be tried for treason’. He then tightened his lips and in a stern tone of voice said: ‘The Slavophones should know that we Greeks decide what happens to them, and not they!’

I said to the commissar: ‘In other words, Markos does not recognize and does not want to know that this struggle is about rights. There is not even a trace of rights for the occupied here, is there? No trace of self-determination, no trace of minority rights and no trace of equality.’

The commissar kept opening and closing his mouth, unable to hold back his anger and as soon as I finished talking he opened his eyes wide, like saucers, and blurted out the words:

‘What do you think? They left properly? They broke their pledge, their commitment to the CPG and to ELAS. They even broke their oath to ELAS! (I swear that I will fight to the last drop of my blood for the complete liberation, stability and independence of Greece. I will fight to preserve the integrity of the Greek people and the establishment of order and basic human rights. For this purpose I will strive to fulfill the orders of PEEA (Political Committee of National Liberation of Greece) by performing due diligence and demonstrating discipline. I will follow orders and instructions from my superiors and I will avoid every process that may turn me into a traitor against the Greek people.)’

I then turned towards him, looked him in the eye and said: ‘What are you telling me Commissar, that the CPG is not happy with the way the Macedonian people are behaving? How are they expected to behave when communists such as yourself care nothing about them. I recognized that a long time ago. The question from the Macedonians to you is entirely another matter. You know what I would say to those who left? I would say to them ‘your homeland, property and family should be your highest priority, your most precious thing in life. Your family and homeland should be your first concern from birth to death! You need your homeland like you need water in the desert or otherwise your homeland will turn to desert. That’s what I would say to them. So, why did Chakaloro and the others leave? I have no idea!’

The commissar then turned to me and said: ‘They left because they were Fascist collaborators. They collaborated with the Italians and Bulgarians...’

I looked at him strangely and thought to myself: ‘What the hell is he talking about? He is not interested in anything except to liquidate us and will use any excuse, even lies, to achieve his objective. Any time we take a step in a different direction they want to chop our heads off... Everything is turning upside down. And what exactly will the rest of us, those who have remained in the ranks of ELAS and the CPG, do?’

After the commissar made a comment like that, I did not have any desire to tell him the truth as to why my friends went to Tito's army. But between you and me, they left because they were angry; angry at the way we Macedonians were treated by the CPG and ELAS and the injustices and humiliation we suffered in their hands.

All I could muster to say was: 'You are blinded by Greek chauvinism and think of primitive ways... you are full of wild ideas. The people who you call collaborators never cooperated with the Italians or Bulgarians. In fact they did the opposite, they protested against the Treaty of Plaka, signed on February 29, 1944, which was an extension to the talks between the CPG and EAM on the one hand and the civil parties and the Greek government in exile on the other, for full political unity in Greece. Among other things it was the CPG which made concessions when it disbanded SNOF and SOV in April 1944. This CPG action was the primary cause for this group of fighters and activists, led by Naum Peiov – Chakalaro, to leave ELAS on May 6, 1944. The reason for this lay primarily in the measures taken by the Greek government to bring national unity without any prospects of resolving the Macedonian question.'

Another man, commander Athanatos, an Asia Minor colonist, who was listening to our conversation turned to me and asked: 'Is that why you think they left our ranks?'

I looked the Commander in the eye and said: 'Precisely because of that. As things are progressing for you, we Macedonians see ourselves returning to the Metaxas era, to the situation before the war. Our unreserved trust in the CPG has been disappointing to say the least. The future for us Macedonians living in Greece does not look bright, but my unwavering attitude is for us to stay here where our roots are. Unfortunately in the situation that we now find ourselves, in spite of our loyalty, we feel like orphans living among step-parents.'

One morning while listening to Radio London we heard a report given by Captain Evans, Patrick Hutchison. The broadcast was devoted to the Macedonian Liberation Movement in Lerin and Kostur Regions, which, among other things highlighted the situation that had taken place. In part the broadcast said:

‘In October 1944, Gotse (Ilia Dimovski), as Kapetanions and practically commander of the 2nd ELAS Battalion of the ELAS 28th Regiment, was ordered to leave Mount Vermion (Durla) but his reply was a flat “no”. “We are Macedonians,” he said, “and our place is in Macedonia”, but I believe Vermion is less Slavic than the Vitsi area where Gotse’s battalion was stationed at the time and where he first expanded it. Vitsi is also Gotse’s birthplace. Gotse then left for Prespa and later for Monastiri (Bitola), taking his battalion with him.

Gotse’s battalion was joined by Chakalaro (Naum Peiov), commander of the “Lazo Trpovski” unit. Chakalaro fought against the Andartes with weapons captured from the Germans. His aim was to create an independent Macedonia, not a greater Bulgaria. He probably had and still has great influence in the countryside near his village Gabresh. His unit was attacked and dispersed by ELAS units in midsummer.’

It was also emphasized that Peiov was a communist even before the war and that he was disappointed by the attitude of the CPG and ELAS towards the Macedonian question. He and a group of people, his comrades in arms, left for Prespa in May. There they visited NOV and NOM General Headquarters at the village Sulin and asked if Macedonians in the ranks of ELAS could join the ranks of Tito’s army. They were well received by Deian who was then reprimanded by Tito for accepting fighters belonging to ELAS. Peiov was released from Tito’s partisans and sent back to ELAS, some say Tito personally gave him amnesty and placed him in Gotse’s battalion. Then, when Gotse revolted in October, Peiov joined him and gave him his support until they reached Bitola.

October 17, 1944.

It didn’t take us too long after that to realize that we had made a mistake. Without saying a word and just by looking at one another we, the people of Kostur, knew that we had made a big mistake by leaving our homeland, the country of our birth, an act for which God would never forgive us.

That night all that the people of Kostur did was talk about the Greeks and what they had done to us all those years, how bad things had happened to us, how the Andartes abused, slaughtered, looted and frightened our people. The worst thing about the Andartes was their raw anger towards us. No one could explain why they were so angry at us. They were Christians, that we knew, and seemed to be poor from the clothes they wore but each one of them carried a pouch full of coins hanging from their necks. From what we were told, most of the Andartes came from the Greek dry islands. They were led by Pavlos Melas and the bishop Karavangelis. They came here while we were still under Ottoman rule,” concluded Krapov.

Krapov stopped talking but only for a moment to get his thoughts organized and then said: “This reminds me of what another person, a person known as the teacher, had said to me. He said: ‘The root of evil is sealed within us. Powerlessness is hidden within us. Our people, no matter where they are, they constantly bless and curse. Now, 55 years later, each one of us surely must know who is worthy of standing before God?’ That’s what he said to me!

The problem with us was that we went along with the foreigners and those insecure amongst us who promised us impossible things. They spun our heads around with their ideologies of how we were going to live in a global village while they Sovietized the Balkans. I don’t know if we all believed them but most of us went along for the ride, eating up their propaganda and thinking of living in an ideal time where the entire world was our homeland. We ignored the reality and conditions under which we were living and, for the life of it, we could not see what was happening to us, even in front of our noses. We tried to avoid the simple and indisputable facts even though they were present and weighing on us in the backs of our minds. Our priority was what the propaganda told us: ‘defend the communist ideology at any cost’ even if we had to forever lose our identity and ancestral homes. Our fate was ours and we needed to take it into our own hands because it is cruel when people don’t want to guide their own fate and, as our people have often said: ‘If you don’t guide your fate then fate will surely guide you!’

There were also those among us who, for a long time, preferred to lie than to tell the truth. For as long as people were not aware that

they were lied to, the lies continued to mount. And us such, stupidity, for example, became wisdom and betrayal became heroism. Some even enjoyed seeing their own people suffer, it was the highest form of ethical durability. The worst thing about this is that if you practiced lying and spreading illusions and then decided to stop, the very act of wanting to quit was considered treason. We had many Macedonians playing the role of God, causing much suffering while using worn out revolutionary phrases praising the past while leaving the future to chance. There were many who had sold their souls. These were people on whom we relied to guide us and these were the very same people who got us involved in the Greek Civil War. Regardless of where they were from, we became dogs because of them..." concluded Krapov.

Krapov remained silent for a long time while looking down at the ground. Then suddenly, without missing a beat, he said: "The Greeks were populating Macedonia with Asian colonists and settlers while we were emptying Macedonia of its Macedonians...!"

After what happened in Kostur and Lerin Regions on October 10th, 1944, Tempo's emissary Rochko from Vatasha arrived in Sarakinovo. The villagers welcomed him as if he was some kind of high official from that part of Macedonia, from behind Mount Kozhuv.

After Rochko arrived he met with Pavle Rakovski - Goche and Giorgi Urdov – Dzhodzho, heads of the battalion, and spoke to them carefully and diplomatically, being unsure how they were going to react.

Rochko said to them: 'We are concerned about the fate of the Macedonian battalion and about our liberation movement in general. We know that your relationship with your fellow Greeks is not going well. They have openly taken the anti-Macedonian course and there is nothing in the Party line regarding equality. SNOF was disbanded and so were other Macedonian organizations. They have forbidden accepting new Macedonian volunteers into the Battalions

or the creation a Macedonian revolutionary military force. Any day now this battalion too will be disbanded.

Therefore I am here and empowered to bring you the following directives:

- a) The battalion is to be placed under the command of the Macedonian NOV General Headquarters, which then will be called the 21st NOV Macedonian Liberation Brigade,
- b) The battalion is to depart immediately and transfer to the territory of Vardar Macedonia, where it will be reorganized and rearmed,
- c) The battalion, after it returns back to its own territory, is to organize a general uprising among the Macedonians...?’

Dzhodzho looked Rochko straight in the eye and wondered nothing. He has no idea what to think in situations like this. He was indifferent to all those around him and did not want to even listen to what was said. Rackovski, on the other hand, shook his head from side to side. To Rochko who was watching carefully, Rakovski’s reaction could have meant only one thing – lack of trust!

Dzhodzho was an ambitious man but up until yesterday he took directives and blindly followed orders without thinking, which ironically elevated him to member of the Provincial Bureau for Macedonia and Thrace and Organizational Secretary of the CPG District Committee for Voden Region. He would not even take a single step without a directive. So, how was he going to secretly take an entire battalion over the border into Macedonia - the territory of another Party?

Perhaps that’s why Dzhodzho asked: ‘Why are you asking us to do this in secret? Revolutions are not carried out secretly?!’

Rochko not knowing how to answer the question suddenly went silent, which prompted Rakovski to speak. Rakovski said: ‘Let us look at the situation realistically Dzhodzho. If we are going to start a revolution, then let us start a revolution! How are we expected to conduct a revolution when we are told we can’t accept volunteers?!’

Think about it! After we return we will be well armed and then we can carry out a general uprising! It will not take us more than a few days before we build up our forces to one or two brigades and possibly to an entire division. If we start a revolution our people will join us en masse and we will be able to block the restrictions of our provokers. We will be accepted and affirmed by the people... They dissolved SNOF and now they are preparing to dissolve our battalion and if they do, where we will be? Our people will be nowhere. Our people know that the Greek Communists don't want to hear even a word about our rights. The same communists in the past said we did not exist. They can say the same now. Do you remember ten years ago during the CPG 5th Congress when there were enquiries about the Macedonian Question? Do you remember what they said? The Communist Party said there was no Macedonian national issue in Macedonia because apparently Macedonians did not exist as a distinct people.'

Dzhodzho looked at Rochko and said: 'Comrade Rochko, now I would like to ask you another question. Please explain to me Yugoslavia's policy regarding this, it has never been clear to me. I don't understand how Metodi Shatorov – Sharlo's supporters have now become Tito's supporters? When earlier, together with Sharlo they were the real Macedonian option?

Vardar Macedonia is a small country and, even though it is recognized as a federal unit within Yugoslavia, it does not have its own sovereignty. Macedonia can not decide its own destiny. If Macedonia cannot have its own freedom and independence how then can it care for its brethren in the other parts of ethnic Macedonia? In fact you no longer support the idea of a United Macedonia. So, please tell me what happened to the people who were determined to fight for a United Macedonia?'

Rochko was silent on the matter and lit a cigarette.

Dzhodzho continued: 'You really don't know, do you? It looks to me like you can't even face up to the truth and admit that those Macedonians who wanted a United Macedonia have been liquidated! Am I right?'

Now you have the nerve to talk to us about our determination: to which Party we Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia should belong, to the CPG or to the CPY? Or should we belong to no one!?

Our dilemma is not harmonious, it is resolute and each Macedonian in Greek occupied Macedonia will have to face it and answer to it. But before there is an answer a decision has to be made because life is nothing more than a series of decisions...’ concluded Dzhodzho.

Rochko at this point looked at Dzhodzho and said: ‘Don’t make an issue out of your suspicions. All those questions you have asked, at this crucial moment, are not important. All approaches have been considered and it is believed that Macedonia can be freed from its slavery. But Macedonia can’t do it alone because it is small and powerless, it will need help. Yugoslavia has made that assessment and guarantees that Macedonia alone can not fight for its freedom’.

Dzhodzho’s reply to that was: ‘I can’t really stomach what you are saying Rochko. Yes, I understand you are trying to convince us, but we Macedonians under Greece should realize that we are citizens of Greece and this is where our roots are, we would not want to be treated as foreigners. If we leave we will give the Greeks a reason to drive us out of our native homes.

You know exactly what Stalin said about revolutionaries:
“NELEZJA ZABLUZHDATSJA!”

Rakovski cut in and said: ‘Are we going to be revolutionaries and show them that we are here and behind Kozhuv and Kajmakchalan Mountains and that we are the same people or are we going to be despondent, fearful of our provocateurs and commit treason against our own people?!’

To that Dzhodzho replied: ‘You did not understand me... Why are you telling me all this? I am not going to keep quiet; I want to ask about everything... even if it is inappropriate. Do you understand what I am saying? It is important that I tell you this; the time for deciding without our consent is over! No one should be deciding for us, without our presence and without our consent! If we are going to

get hurt, let it be because of our own mistakes and not because of someone else's decision.

If we run we will be guilty not only before our Macedonian eternal existence, culture and history but we will be guilty before God himself.

The mistakes that we are making today can be divided into three categories: military, political and moral, and the price for these mistakes will be paid for by thousands of Macedonians, and on top of that we will never be allowed to return to our homes!

There is also a truth that we must learn and never forget; nothing is decided in the Balkans without Great Power approval. Their word is the final word! The ones that gain the most are the ones who have Great Power support. The Greeks know that very well and that is why they have allied themselves with the English. We Macedonians, on the other hand, have allied ourselves with no one because we have learned nothing from history. We have no allies to look after our interests and we are not even a political or military factor. Every decision made about us, be it in Bucharest or Paris, every congress and peace conference held on our behalf was done without us. Now we are doing this again... we have allowed the Communist Parties to look after our interests and we are deciding whether to fight or run away...?

We are in a dilemma alright! A terrible dilemma. The truth is that our options are limited because people like us are rarely given the opportunity to decide for ourselves. I am not going to hesitate and say that we have bitten the ideological bait and our future has been strategically pre-planned. We have become victims of someone else's interests in these political games played over us. This looks more like a political trap to me with every passing moment... So now we are being asked to kick the CPG where it hurts and look for our future in the CPY! Is that it?

That means that we fought and failed to gain our national rights, right here at home while fighting for the CPG and now we are being asked to do the same outside through the CPY? I am afraid my

friends that we will be walking into a trap set for us by strangers where we lose not just our freedom but everything...

I must say gentlemen that I am confident that by leaving our ancestral homes we are at risk of bringing about our own national demise. What kind of future will there be for us Macedonians from Greece? That I do not know...

However, only the politically naïve may think that this whole thing was not staged in the highest places – at our expense - to bring us harm.

We are leaving our birthplace. This means that we are taking a major step into the unknown... at least that's how Macedonia's history is going to describe the next step we are about to take...'

Headed by Rakovski and accompanied by Dzhodzho, the battalion left without any difficulties and sometime before noon arrived near the first village in Tikvesh Region on the other side of Mount Kozhuv.

The next day, all excited, Dzhodzho's assistant in military affairs, a Greek named Lefteris Foundoulakis, arrived in Tikvesh. The day before Foundoulakis had wandered into the old camp and when he found it deserted he went looking for Dzhodzho, which brought him to Tikvesh.

Dzhodzho and the others told him that, although they had nothing against him, he could not remain with the Macedonians. The Greek nodded affirmatively and grudgingly climbed on his horse and took the road back.

When he arrived at ELAS General Headquarters Foundoulakis was not well received. He was looked down upon and treated like a commander who had just lost his unit or, in this case, did not prevent the withdrawal of a military unit.

After a few days of rest, the Macedonian battalion was transferred to the garrison in Bitola where it was joined by other Macedonian fighters who had deserted ELAS.

Of course here in Bitola they did not feel like guests, they felt as if they were at home in their own free country, they were a federal unit in Federal Democratic Yugoslavia. The Party and the State Leadership of the People's Republic of Macedonia felt as if it was their leadership. They had enormous respect for Tito's people and for the leadership in Bitola. They felt absolutely safe there.

Back in the village Vatasha, with Rochko's help, Dzhodzho made contact with senior Yugoslav military and Party officials but was not happy about it. When he returned to the battalion he was very bitter and opened up to Rakovski and the others. He said: 'Now I am going to tell you what I wanted to tell you before. What do I see? I see a division... yet another division of Aegean Macedonia. Why are Tempo and the others now meddling in our problems? As a Macedonian I feel belittled and I am ashamed because of that... When I stand in front of one of Tito's army officers I feel like I am constricted, not by the officer but by Yugoslav policies. One time Tempo spoke of an independent United Macedonia, now he talks about a United Macedonia but under Yugoslavia. What next?

You know what? Not everything that Rochko told us was true! But now...' said Dzhodzho, while shaking his head and waving his arm around, 'what happens happens...!'

Dzhodzho, sad and emotional, went silent for a moment and then looked at Rakovski and said: 'How do you think our story will end? I am not a prophet and can't tell you exactly how it will end, but I can tell you it will end badly... It will end badly the way it started. Up to now we danced to the tune of the Greeks, now we will have to dance to the tune of the Yugoslavs. Not only did we do this to ourselves but we now have given the Greeks a real reason to pursue our demise. We also enabled the Greeks to go after us outside of Greece and, in some future time, destroy Vardar Macedonia because they now also see it as a threat.'

Unable to contain himself Rakovski said: ‘I can’t do anything now...’

While in Bitola both Rakovski and Dzhodzho were appointed members of the Political Commission for Aegean Macedonia. I too was appointed member of the bilateral Secretariat and, as I recall, Dzhodzho one time said to Rakovski: ‘Even though the leadership in Tito’s circles recognizes our sacrifices, I am not sure how Macedonian history is going to judge us for leaving our homes so easily. We quietly left our place of birth and boarded a ship to nowhere...’

Like Dzhodzho, there were many of us who had questions but no answers. Questions like: ‘Why did Tempo invite the Kostur, Lerin and Voden battalions to cross over into Yugoslavia?! What was his aim by doing that? Why displace these Macedonian people?’

Let me ask you this, according to logic who is a true advocate for human rights: the one who invokes International Law and justifies standing by while genocide is being committed against his people, or the one who endures life in his native hearth and is ready to stand up and fight for his rights?

Unfortunately Dzhodzho was afraid of saying anything that might put him in a bad situation because in those days if you disagreed with people too much you were either petty or a provocateur. And Dzhodzho did not want to be any of those things.

Now let us look at the military archives and see what the ‘Alien Gods’ had in order for us. Here is a summary of events:

October 4, 1944

According to radiograph number 35, sent by Svetozar Vukmanovich - Tempo to NOV and POJ General Headquarters, regarding the ‘incorrect attitudes and behaviours of the Greek resistance leadership’ towards the Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia:

‘The Greeks have again endeavoured to abuse the Macedonians in Greece. They are prohibiting the mobilization and arming of new soldiers into the Macedonian units. They are removing Macedonians from leadership positions and replacing them with Greeks. They are arresting officers, killing innocent people and banning Macedonian songs, including those about Tito.

Therefore we are advising Macedonians to move to our country so that they can avoid arrest and abuse. You will receive a number of Macedonian leaders and senior people with whom you will form a delegation, which will provide evidence material for the General Headquarters of Macedonia.

Signed, Tempo.’

October 5, 1944

Another radiograph, radiograph number 3, sent by Aleksandar Rankovich addressed to Svetozar Vukmanovich – Tempo, had orders to ‘not send’ Yugoslav NOV and POJ units to Aegean Macedonia. In part the radiograph said:

‘...for everyone not to send units to Greece. Gather specific information so that we can protest to representatives of Greece (ELAS General Headquarters and PEEA. Andreas Dzhimas was the Greek representative in Yugoslavia’s NOV.)’

October 6, 1944

Another radiograph, radiograph number 43, sent by Vukmanovich - Tempo to NOV and POJ General Headquarters, reported on the ELAS repression of Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia. In part the radiograph said:

‘Because of the resumption of mass terror by Greek partisans against the Macedonian units in Greece, we had considered the idea

of sending our units to Greece to fight against the Germans and to protect our population.

Signed, Tempo.’

Here is what Tempo said in his speech on November 7, 1944: ‘The Macedonian people, like any other nation in this world, have the right to self-determination and self-division.

No one has the right to interfere in that and to divide them without their consent. We gained that right after fighting in the war for three years, we earned our right. We, brother Macedonians, do not ask for more than what we deserve. We want to solve our own problems, decide our own fate and reap what we sowed, what we planted and watered with our own blood.

Death to Fascism - Freedom to the people!’

The above speech was delivered by General Tempo, Tito’s representative in Macedonia, during a rally held in Bitola on November 7, 1944, in honour of the Great Russian Revolution.

When I finished talking, the man called ‘the teacher’ was still looking at me so I asked him: ‘What do you think? Was Svetozar Vukmanovich - Tempo telling the truth and was he truly concerned about us Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia?’

Surprised, the teacher looked at me and said: ‘No! Tempo was from the old guard from Royal Yugoslavia and nothing more. He was a sly fellow who attempted to cover up historical scars. He had a specific role; first to lure our battalions across the border into Yugoslavia and then combine them into a brigade and make them fight against the Albanian Balisti. It was all premeditated! Had we stayed and had we continued to fight for the rights of the Macedonian people in Greece, we would have left a strong impression on the world and on the International Community that Macedonians do exist in Greece... Therefore we had to go... Unfortunately most of us at the time had forgotten what had been

done to us by these same people... and we again began to trust them. We again began to trust our troublesome neighbours who divided our country and attempted to annihilate us. And again we fell into their trap...

At that time the Macedonian nation was divided into four sovereign states, which had different political systems and all those states wanted more of Macedonia for themselves. They never did anything for us, whatever they did they did for their benefit; we were their brothers when they needed us and their worst enemies when they didn't. This was the policy of neighbours no matter what kind of party or government was in power. Our fraternal friends the communists (CPB, CPY and CPG) were no different. When they needed us we were their brothers and when they did not need us we became their worst enemies. They were never inclined to support us as a Macedonian people let alone let us create an extended Macedonian state out of Macedonia's territory. They each aggressively fought against us. We should recognize and always remember that it is our lands they want and not us. The goal of each of our occupiers has in essence remained unchanged since the day they occupied and divided our country in 1912, 1913. Their goal was and still is to dominate Macedonia and annex as much of its territory as possible. Our occupiers have never recovered from that ailment. This is why, even today, they will not hesitate to put us in precarious positions and wish us to disappear... self-destruct... We must always remember that... We must always remember what they have done to us and what they are capable of doing to us.

Everything I told you is rooted in our history and goes back to our distant past. Our problems and quarrels have been exploited and turned against us... against our very existence.

In all our being and in all our existence throughout history before Macedonia's division, we never had a need to divide, relocate and quarrel amongst us like we do now. If we hadn't been lied to so much and lured into this predicament, we, for the Greeks, would have been a reality whether they liked it or not and this devastation we are experiencing today would not have happened... But then again we made the same historic mistake of doing what the strangers wanted us to do...

Tempo confirmed this himself on October 16, 1945 during a campaign speech in Kumanovo when he was a candidate in Kumanovo District in opposition to all those who wanted a United Macedonia outside of Yugoslavia. In other words, a United Macedonia under the auspices of the great powers. Tempo labeled those people traitors. He said these people were the same people responsible for Bulgaria's occupation of Macedonia in 1941 to 1944.

Today many historians have concluded that the Macedonian battalions, which included many strong Macedonian leaders and well-known communists, did not leave Greece because they rejected the Greek political Left, they left Greece because they wanted to force the CPG, EAM and ELAS to accept their national rights.

This is what the Lerin and Kostur battalion leaders said in a letter addressed to the EAM Central Committee and to ELAS General Headquarters: 'We did not leave to become servants of fascism... we did not leave because we wanted to become enemies of the people... like you have labeled us... we left because we are Macedonian fighters, because we want to fight against fascism... in a fraternal antifascist struggle... and the many sacrifices we made, we want recognized... We want the demographic principles of our anti-fascist struggle, the national rights of our people and their freedoms recognized ... We want to be there, on our lands and fight alongside you, to assist you in your fight... united and fraternal. We are certain that ELAS and EAM... in the spirit of friendship ... will make the right decision.'

However it is necessary to emphasize that, with the formation of the political committee whose working meetings were chaired by Pekar and Minchev, as representatives of the CPM Central Committee and the First Aegean Macedonian Shock Brigade of the Aegean Macedonian National Liberation Movement, the fighters from Greek occupied Macedonia were organized into a brigade and placed in the NOV and PO composition of Macedonia in the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), which in turn was placed under the leadership of the CPY.

In other words, Macedonian units from ELAS were accepted by the CPM / CPY. In fact NOD, the national liberation movement in this part of Macedonia, was passed on to the CPM / CPY leadership.

So there was no Macedonian factor there and everything was in line with CPY policy, which had a huge impact on the Macedonian communists in Vardar Macedonia... In other words, in this historical evolutionary process, the Macedonian movement was born with Yugoslav orientation: ‘No to a United and Independent Macedonia and yes to a unified Macedonia to include the Aegean and Pirin parts, but as part of Yugoslavia.’

In other words Vardar Macedonia was declared the ‘Piedmont’ in Macedonia’s unification under the Yugoslav composition. This idea then became a slogan for NOF (organized and established in 1945 by the CPM / CPY): ‘We are organizing the Macedonian people into a struggle to bridge the artificial chasm between Macedonians from all parts of Macedonia, especially with the people from the People’s Republic of Macedonia who are the “Piedmont” for the complete liberation and unification of all the Macedonian people,’ concluded the teacher.

Impressed by his depth of knowledge I curiously looked at the teacher and asked him: ‘So, you estimate this was all an intentionally perpetrated act? And to think that all those people believed the Yugoslav Communist Party propaganda and remained alienated all their lives?!’

The teacher turned to me and said: ‘Yes! But there were also those who were pushed by the situation to become even more Yugoslav than Tempo.’

After the Macedonian battalions left Greece and went to Yugoslavia, EAM authorities, led by the CPG, started a strong propaganda campaign against those who fled and the reaction was tremendous to say the least. The Greek communists began to hunt down the families and close relatives of those who left and those caught were sent to special camps formerly used to lock up Greek nationalists and associates of the occupier.’

At this point the teacher pulled a yellowed sheet of paper out of his pocket, opened it and showed me the date. It was dated October 18, 1944. He then said: 'I will read for you a few things that those who left for Vardar Macedonia took with them. They presented themselves as the People's Delegation from Greek occupied Macedonia: Paskal Mitrevski, Head of the Macedonian movement in Kostur, Mihail Keramitdziev, People's President of Kostur and Lambro Cholakov, worker and member of the delegation from Kostur Region.'

The teacher began to read:

'Review of notes and Party minutes that provide insight into the expulsion of the Macedonians: Communists, ELAS personnel, EAM personnel and rebels in Yugoslavia.

Classified: To POV and PO General Headquarters in Vardar Macedonia. (Macedonian Archives)

EXHIBIT:

Errors, wrong-doings and other acts perpetrated by Greeks to the detriment of the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia during the three year anti-fascist struggle:

1...), 2)... e) Mass executions were conducted during this period which included the killing of 60 rebels who escaped from the Germans and came to Peiovo to surrender. But because they wanted to surrender to Peiovo and to a Macedonian partisan unit, and not to the Greeks, the Greeks, from hatred and fanaticism towards the Macedonian people, killed all 60 of them. This was wrong and illegal and the Greeks in their beastly ways broke every ELAS and PEEA law and executed those people without a trial. This beastly act shook our whole nation causing ripples of fear in the souls of our people. The execution of these 60 men was contrary to Article 113 of ELAS military law.

g) Basically at the same time, a little after Regiment 28 and Periklis from the CPG Regional Committee announced that they would compensate the voluntary surrender of Macedonian rebels from the

Macedonian villages in Kostur and would release the rebels, after they were disarmed, several rebels surrendered. But in place of compensating and letting them go, the Greeks jailed them in Lari in the village Izglibe. Some were also killed.

h) At the same time there were confiscations. Oxen, sheep and other animals belonging to the rebels who went to Peiov were confiscated.

i) Some Macedonian partisans, belonging to the “Gotse” Battalion, were forbidden from singing because they sang derogatory songs about Greek King George. They were not only forbidden from singing such songs but Major Amintas threatened them with arrest...

o) Secretary of Kostur Periklis was heard saying: ‘We are not for Tito and if you continue to say “long live Tito” we will cut your head off!’

When the bureau of SNOF was arrested, the CPG District Committee began a fierce campaign against the old Macedonian fighters and leaders and especially against their friends like Lazo Ushensk, Paskal Mitrevski, Lazo Pop Lazarov... They accused them of being agents of Vancho Mihailov and of the Ohrana, just like they accused other Macedonians from Yugoslavia like Deian, member of the Macedonian General Headquarters, the deceased Kolio, Political Commissar of the First Macedonian Brigade, and comrade Abas, member of the General Staff of Macedonia.’

... This was the attitude of the Communist Party of Greece towards our people...” concluded Krapov who suddenly went silent seeming like he had forgotten what he was going to say next. I said nothing; I did not want to interrupt his moment of silence.

The way to battle for the Aegean Brigade was through the ranks of Tito’s Army

A few moments later Krapov looked at me and began to talk again. He said: “One evening inside a bunker in Gramos in 1947, sitting next to the hot fire was Vane Shishkov, Commissar of our company. He told us a story about his experience fighting in Vardar

Macedonia. He talked about his struggles in the Aegean Brigade while his family, his young wife and children were left home alone.

He then suddenly stopped talking. I couldn't help but notice his dark and intelligent eyes staring at my face. He stared at me with a slight smile on his face... perhaps because I was the youngest fighter in the detachment? I don't know...

After noticing that he saw me looking back at him, I felt nervous and the need to say something, so I said: 'Is there anything you wanted to tell me, Comrade Commander?'

He said: 'No, I have nothing to tell you young man.' Seeming like he lost his trail of thought.

I felt even more nervous now because he kept looking at me so I blurted out the words: 'Are you sure... you have nothing to tell me?'

He smiled with a great big smile and said: 'I have a son... maybe a bit younger than you... and as I look at you I wonder why you are here? Did you volunteer?'

'No!' I said. 'I was mobilized by NOF against my will!'

After hearing that, the Commander lost his smile and shook his head in silence.

'Is there something wrong?' I asked.

'No, there is nothing wrong,' he said. 'When I saw you earlier I lost my train of thought. I wanted to tell you how we live in a politically immature society, how times were really bad and then, as we joined Tito's partisans, how everything went differently than we expected.'

I admired our Commander's guilt free confidence and honesty. He told us about the Brigade being stationed in the barracks in Bitola. And that it was composed of an unusual mixture of scattered units without a timetable and that for almost two months it was crunching seeds (doing nothing).

Then the Commander said: ‘One December day something long-expected began to take place. We heard voices coming from afar, as if carried by the whistling wind from the fields of Lerin Region. Then a group of refugees arrived in the evening; women, children and elders. The day before several Lerin Region villages had been attacked by ELAS and people were killed, young women raped, houses burned and people expelled across the border.

One of our men ran like crazy towards the refugees and then turned back and ran for the barracks holding his machine guns in his hands ready to fire.

It took me all night, until dawn the next day to calm him down. He was my comrade, Sergeant Pavle Karamitrev. The refugees told him that his beautiful bride Risa had been raped and then killed and left unburied and then from malice they killed his three year old child. The man was devastated, mentally exhausted, tormented, nauseated and felt alien to himself. He tried very hard to think about other things, something else, something interesting - but he found it impossible. His thoughts quickly circled around back to his tragedy. He wondered now what kind of new, wonderful life he could make. There was nowhere for him to go, he could not escape his dilemma. He became very angry and lost track of everything, the only thing he wanted was revenge, just revenge.’

‘Yes, I remember that!’ I replied. ‘Sergeant Pavle Karamitrev used to yell out: ‘Stupid! We are stupid and cowards! Sold souls! We left our homes and families to come here to do what? Eat seeds?!’

He did not like being there at all. He thought that it was a grave mistake for us to have left our homes. In fact he was so angry he often looked out of his tiny window aiming to kill someone, perhaps one of our top brigade commanders who had taken us there. He used to yell out and curse the brigade commanders.’

‘Yes! He was not happy at all!’ agreed the Commander, saying: ‘Sergeant Pavle Karamitrev used to flap his long arms and say: ‘Who did this to me? Who killed my future?’

A few days later, sometime before the new year in December 1944, a large number of them went to the Greek border to enter Greece from Lerin Region, with aims at freeing part of Greek occupied Macedonia.

Unfortunately their plan fell flat. By order from Macedonia's General Headquarters (most probably issued by Belgrade) they were stopped at the border. Belgrade did not support their action or appreciate what they were doing and since then they also lost support from their brethren in Vardar Macedonia.

After their failure to return to Greece, the Brigade was given a new task and was immediately dispatched to Gostivar - Tetovo Region with only one purpose: to clean up Dzhemo and Mefail's Balist bands. These bands were formed during the Italian and German occupations but continued to operate after the occupiers withdrew, abusing and harassing the Macedonian people in those areas. The Aegean Brigade was entrusted with this task because the units that controlled that region had been sent to fight at the Srem front. Dzhemo's bandits circulated extensively in the Suva Gora and Shar Planina Mountains and in Kichevo Region. They also had full support from the local Albanian population.'

After a short pause the commander then said: 'It was towards the end of the month,... I think it was December 28, 1944 and the weather was very cold. It snowed all the time along the way while we were traveling on foot, walking over the Demir Hisar mountains before we arrived somewhere between Ohrid and Kichevo. The places were strange to us and we, the lower ranking officers, had no maps to see where we were going. We passed through several Albanian villages and seized many guns and quite a bit of ammunition. It seemed to me like we were moving through the desert. The whole area was covered with thick layers of snow which came down in abundance. One evening we arrived in Kichevo. It was very cold and we were freezing down to our bones. It was a bad winter and snow came down like never before. The cold was bitter and nothing was moving. The soil seemed like it was full of some sort of monsters and the people were unhappy, impoverished and without food. We had no food either and wandered around hungry. We were also very poorly dressed, literally in our summer clothes.

That's all we had. One night my company stayed in Kichevo over night in a café, which smelled of decay, mold and moisture. An old man looking at us said:

‘You must be out of your minds to come here. I am telling you there is not a living soul in the villages, not a single partisan. They were all sent to the Srem front. Who in the devil are you looking for in this wasteland? I am telling you, you are foolish to have come here, it is pointless. Fighters need to defend their own homes not... Further on there are Balists who will cut of your heads... nothing more...’

The next day we went to Gostivar and stayed in a place near the Vardar River. Ten days later the Third Battalion moved into the village Banitsa and my company was placed in the school. Commander of the squad was Kosta Samarovski and his deputy was Todor from the village Buf.

The Brigade remained in Gostivar and Tetovo through the months of January, February and March 1945. Every second or third night we were attacked by the Balists and we fought bloody battles against them.

Acting on information received by Headquarters, regarding Dzhemo and Mefail's gang movements, we were ordered to move out a bit before midnight so that we could be at a specified place before dawn. We marched through the snow under the cover of darkness 3 to 4 hours walking over Suva Gora, Shara and then we surrounded the village about which we had information of where bandits were hiding. The moment it became visible we attacked. Unfortunately every move we made was closely watched by supporters of the Balist gangs, who were well organized. Their couriers immediately provided information to Dzhemo and he and his Balists left before we had a chance to attack them.

I remember one time conducting an operation in an Albanian village where we arrived very early, before dawn, and surrounded it. When dawn broke several of our units entered the village. Suddenly the moon was obstructed by clouds and it became very dark. At that moment Dzhemo's gang began to fire on us from a house with automatic weapons, killing two of our fighters. The vast majority of

our fighters were from Lerin, Kostur and Voden Regions. After that the Albanians began to flee but were held back by our gunfire. They tried to run one way but they couldn't so they turned and ran the opposite way and finally escaped through a gully. We were shooting exclusively with single shot weapons. Our machine guns were jammed because of the cold. We were hungry and very tired and sleepy.

There was a peculiar smell in the air and we were wondering what it could be. Then Vangel Klapushevski piped up and said that it was the smell of burning human blood. The smell was very strong and the wind, which constantly changed direction, carried it everywhere. Finally we located its source. It came from one of the many barns the Balists used. There we found human bodies burning, victims of the Balists.

The smell inside the barn was very strong and nauseating. We stood there looking at the burning bodies and wondered what kind of people would perpetrate such an inhuman act.

Then when I found out that the burning bodies belonged to our fighters I lost consciousness. I tried to steady myself and stay on my feet but the thought of my comrades burning overwhelmed me and I fell down.

Even though I miss my dead comrades from Kostur Region, since then I could not bring myself to think of them without seeing them burning. I don't even know where they are buried.

We were ordered to move out. The order was given by Gotse, our commander. He ordered us to stay close to one another in a column and to not fall back or stray.

After waging battles against the Balists in Gostivar - Tetovo Region, the First Macedonian Aegean Shock Brigade was relocated to Bitola and Gevgelia. The Greek government protested strongly about the move, claiming that it was an act of territorial claims against Greece. As a result, by special order number 236 sent directly by Josip Broz Tito on April 2, 1945, the First Macedonian Aegean Shock Brigade was forcibly disbanded.

All fighters were then redeployed to various units in Tito's Army inside the People's Republic of Macedonia, but only for a few months. Every day after that a bunch of us would be loaded on trucks covered with tarpaulin and transported to the Greek border where we were recruited into the ranks of DAG, but now under the command of Greek officers.

And those who organized the Macedonian Battalions' escape into Yugoslavia i.e. went from ELAS into Tito's army, were protected by Kulishevski's government and appointed to high positions in the Republic of Macedonia. Some stayed in those positions to the end of their lives, serving their masters well.

Under pressure from the situation in Greece and for the purpose of liquidating the Kostur and others bands, SNOF (6) (Slavo - Macedonian National Liberation Front) and SNOV (Slavo - Macedonian National Liberation Army) were created,' concluded the Commander.

Let us now pause for a moment and present the reader with some facts. On April 23, 1949 the 1940 general course of events was explained as follows:

The Macedonians were placed under the watchful eye of the British mission, the Greek Communist Party, ELAS and EAM:

SNOF (Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front) and its armed Partisan wing SNOV (Slavo-Macedonian National Army) were created in the fall of 1943. These organizations were created because of the horrible situation in which the Macedonian people, under Greek control, found themselves. There was also fear that once the Greeks came back to Greek occupied Macedonia they would liquidate the Kostur bands and all other fighters.

The SNOF founding Conference for Kostur was held on December 24, 1943 and for Lerin on December 27, 1943.

At the founding conferences SNOF had to comply with Tempo's instructions, which basically called for building a platform for a

joint struggle between the Macedonian and Greek people. The platform's basic principles were:

1. Form a unified struggle between the Macedonian and Greek people in Aegean Macedonia as a condition for a victorious struggle against the fascist occupation;
2. Mobilize Macedonians en masse in ELAS units and prepare for an armed struggle to rout out the occupiers;
3. Fight a political and armed struggle against Kamchev's bands and against Mihailov and the Gestapo who, with their autonomist propaganda, want to turn the Macedonian people against the Greeks and vice versa;
4. The Macedonian people will struggle together with the Greek people, within EAM against the occupiers. The Greek people will help the Macedonian people realize their national aspirations and right to self-determination on the basis of the Atlantic Charter Principles and on other major ally resolutions.

With that said the SNOF District Committee, for the first time in front of the Communist Party of Greece, officially set the Macedonian National Question in motion.

At the time, still in its infancy, the CPG leadership had limited initiatives and most which were directed against the Macedonian bands armed by the occupiers. This is why when it defined its own, EAM and PEEA's principles and when it signed agreements with the Greek government in exile and with the British mission, the CPG did not recognize the rights of the Macedonians. So what changed? Nothing changed. Initially the CPG was against the formation of Macedonian Partisan units with Macedonians seeking their national rights. But then when it realized that these same Macedonians were capable of forming their own independent forces, they changed their mind. So the CPG's aim was not to help the Macedonians gain their rights but to stop them from organizing independently.

It is a historic fact that the CPG and EAM leadership, up until April 1944, used SNOF for its own political and military aims, primarily in dealing with the armed bands. Then in the beginning of May 1944 the CPG disbanded SNOF and SNOV because they had become an obstacle in the CPG's negotiations with the Greek government in exile and with the other coalition government parties scheduled to meet in mid-May 1944.

Negotiations to divide the Balkans into spheres of influence began on May 5, 1944. Britain gained supremacy over Greece and the Soviet Union over Romania. On May 20, 1944 the CPG, EAM and ELAS, under British pressure in Lebanon, signed an agreement with the Royal Government after which the coalition government was dissolved.

During a conference held on July 25, 1944, the communists in Macedonia unanimously agreed to pull out from the Lebanon Agreement as well as for the People's Liberation Movement to apply revolutionary tactics and to rely on its own forces and on the Yugoslav People's Liberation Army. The CPG leadership was divided on the issue, one group wanted to accept the Agreement and another wanted to reject it.

The group that advocated for the acceptance of the Agreement prevailed. The Soviet military mission headed by Colonel Grigor Popov, which had arrived in the free territory on July 28, 1944, contributed to the acceptance of the Agreement. Popov was well aware of how Stalin had operated in changing the Russian system into a one-party dictatorship and removing any competition by liquidation, not just in Russia but everywhere in the world. Stalin wanted Moscow to lead all Parties and branches of the Comintern in the world and anyone opposed to that was liquidated. Stalin wanted Moscow to be the absolute centralization of management of all communist parties.

Here is what Soviet citizen Grigor Popov, a high representative in the Soviet government with full powers, had to say later: "Here is the directive... this is what Comrade Stalin ordered!"

The Agreement was accepted by the CPG Central Committee on August 17, 1944 and a decision was made to take part in the coalition government headed by George Papandreou.

Here is what Stringos, member of the CPG Central Committee Politburo, had to say during the acceptance meeting: “The Central Committee, not once but many times, had warned Gotse and Peiov that their attitude and behaviour would bring them no good! We, again and again, told the Slavo-Macedonian communists to subordinate themselves to the Party and their lives would be spared. But did they want to? Well if they didn’t want to, then in that case let them leave, let them get lost, let them go to hell!” This was followed by applause.

Now let us resume the story and see what else the Commander had to say. After a short pause the commander began talking again. He said: ‘Until April 1944, the CPG and EAM leaderships used SNOF for their own military and political objectives, especially in their campaigns against the Band Movements in Greek occupied Macedonia. Then, when their objectives were fulfilled, the Greeks, in early May 1944, disbanded both SNOF and SNOV. They did this mainly because the Macedonian organizations were obstacles and the main hurdle in the CPG’s negotiations with the Greek government in exile and with the other civil parties in forming a coalition government which was scheduled to meet in mid-May 1944.

After the Macedonian bands were liquidated many of the fighters joined SNOV and were subsequently forced into joining ELAS where they experienced much discrimination from the Greeks, including threats to their lives. They were accused of being traitors and working for the Bulgarian occupier. ‘We will destroy you, you Bulgarian bandits, you Ilinden dogs, because you want to give Kostur and the Kostur Region villages to Bulgaria.’

The former Macedonian band fighters were not so easily intimidated and answered the Greeks with their own insults, telling them: ‘You are Andartes - Greek dogs. Our people do not want you here. You have destroyed everything of ours, our church, our language... you have changed our names, place names and have banned our songs

and dances... You have Hellenized everything. God will curse you and punish you... We are who we are and will remain that way guarding our heritage forever...’

The Macedonian communists belonging to the CPG, with their demagoguery, had answers of their own for the bold Macedonian fighters. One of the answers they gave was: ‘We are Communists and these Greeks are not like the old Greek Andartes who used to hang and slaughter our people. Join us, we are all Macedonians belonging to an all Macedonian army. We are fighting alongside the Greeks for the sake of the Macedonian and Greek people.’

I guess history has taught us nothing so we continue to make the same old mistakes; trusting those who invaded, occupied and partitioned our country and committed all kinds of genocides against our people. And what did our kindness do for us? We have been exiled from our homes forever. That’s our reward for being naïve...

The old folks used to say: ‘Those who don’t respect their own will be used by strangers!’

After many of the Macedonian Kostur Band fighters were lured into the ranks of SNOF, on October 10th, 1944 Tempo and his emissaries arrived in Koreshtata’...”

“The Commander paused for a moment,” said Krapov, “looked me in the eyes and asked: ‘In whose way do you think these Macedonian Band fighters stood and why do you suppose SNOF was formed and by whom?’ But before I had a chance to even open my mouth he said:

‘On August 2 and 3, 1944 the CPG and EAM Central Committee, along with ELAS and CPG General Headquarters, decided to disband the Macedonian battalions and send most of the fighters to be deployed in the south, in the depths of Greece among the ELAS units. That way any existing Macedonian political or military formations, configurations and organizations would be dismantled and in time completely eliminated. The prospect of this upset many Macedonians and created panic, especially by the various rumours that the Greeks wanted to liquidate them.

In the meantime the CPG and ELAS disbanded SNOF and forbid it to operate. They also forbade volunteers from the Kostur Bands from joining its military wing. In other words the Macedonians were not allowed to form a Macedonian Revolutionary military force. At the same time new problems began to surface between the Macedonians in ELAS, CPG and the Band fighters.

Soon afterwards on April 23rd, 1945, while the Second World War was still going on and while the Right in Greece, with help from the United Kingdom, re-established rule in Greece and began a crackdown on the resistance movement, especially in Greek occupied Macedonia, the Macedonian organizations NOF, NOMS and AFZH were formed in Skopje. These organizations were created outside of Greece and independent of the CPG,' concluded the Commander.”

“And why were these organizations created when the war was almost over?” asked Krapov, “if not to continue the conflict in Greece? I am telling you this is when things began to go downhill for us Macedonians. This is what research has shown. I am telling you!

What does the scripture say? It says: ‘The light at the top of the mountain cannot be hidden.’

I am telling you that the power of foreign policy is the best kept secret in the history of the Greek Civil War. It was about the same time and even later that frequent reports began to surface which, according to British and American beliefs, claimed that Stalin, in the framework of his expansionist policy, was going to open the doors to the Aegean Sea and extend to the Middle East and other places. According to British and American beliefs, Stalin could have achieved this in two ways: by Soviet-izing Greece or by the unification of Macedonia and the creation of a Macedonian state as an independent entity or within the Yugoslavian federation. Unfortunately the British and the Americans were totally against such ideas.

This was impossible because, ever since 1943, Britain had made sure that Greece was placed under its influence. On July 5th, 1943 Britain asked that the EAM and ELAS movements be placed under its control and as such the CPG and EAM took command of them at Middle East Headquarters. This takeover was due to the unsuccessful attempt to negotiate, with the Greek government in exile, its role in the coalition government which was to be formed in August 1943. One of the conditions for the CPG to become part of this coalition was to disarm and destroy the Macedonian fighters.

In 1941 British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt met on a boat in the Atlantic, where they formulated the famous “Atlantic Charter”, signed on August 14, whose principles were adopted in the United Nations Declaration in 1945. The Charter, among other things, stated that territorial change must be made in accordance with the agreement and the free will expressed by the people. The people have the right to choose for themselves the form of government they want. All rights must be returned to the people and nations must refrain from using force... So, let me ask you this. How did this apply to the Macedonian people?

Furthermore it was disclosed that: ‘After the CPG and EAM leadership used SNOF for their own political and military purposes, primarily in curbing the Macedonian Band movements, especially in Kostur Region, towards the end of April they felt SNOF was no longer needed. In early May the CPG Central Committee decided to dissolve SNOF and have its members join the ranks of EAM.’

We Macedonians never had any discussions with the senior authorities of the CPG Central Committee but always quarreled with local Greek CPG and EAM leaders in Kostur, Lerin and Voden Regions. We Macedonians never organized or voiced any concerns or raised issues that were of vital importance to our survival and to the preservation of our centuries old homeland and civilization. We Macedonians never organized a single protest against the Greek government in front of the International Community regarding the ethnic changes in our lands and the 640,000 colonists and settlers from Asia Minor deposited in our country by Greek governments. We never complained about Greece not caring for us after the

division of Macedonia. We never even made a concerted effort to seek rights as an indigenous population in Macedonia.

Let me tell you something which I heard from a serious historiographer (See: "N. M." 20.08.1994): 'At about mid-1944, the situation in Aegean Macedonia, regarding the Macedonian communists, became unbearable. The Greek communists, directed by the English Intelligence Service, undertook a number of measures to quell the Macedonian People's Liberation Movement by preventing Macedonian fighters from joining the Macedonian battalions under the pretext that the battalions were an "uncertain" army.

The Greeks broke up the Macedonian National Liberation Front in Greece when a large group of Macedonians left the ranks of ELAS and passed into the ranks of Tito's Army. ELAS Headquarters declared these people deserters. They are now being managed by the CPY / CPM.' And that's what the historiographer said," concluded Krapov and went silent.

The Greek Civil War (1946 - 1949)

It was my turn to say something: "Should there have been a Greek Civil War? What did the Macedonians gain by it, especially the fighters who survived? Was this war planned to displace the Macedonian people from Greece?" I asked. Then I said:

"In order to answer these questions we need to not only examine the facts but we need to have a hard look at the final outcome of this tragic war.

There was no need for a Greek Civil War. The Second World War had ended and everything had been decided by the Great Powers. The world had already been divided into spheres of influence, while Greece fell under British influence Yugoslavia fell under Soviet. And thus the Greek Civil War could not have been about "Soviet-izing" Greece.

In the final analysis the Macedonian people gained nothing from the war, in fact they lost plenty; many lost their lives and the majority

who participated in the war were exiled and lost their ancestral homes forever. In other words, Greece was “emptied” of the staunch Macedonians.

How could this have happened?

The aim of the Greek communists in entering this war was not for them to die for their country but to have the Macedonians die for Greece. The Greek communists and official Athens, which the communists called fascist, had the same objective: “A Macedonia without Macedonians!” It was exactly because of this war that the Macedonians lost their ethnic and historical status in Greek occupied Macedonia.

The Greeks wanting a Macedonia without Macedonians was no secret, even Markos Vafiadis made that very clear several times.

General Markos Vafiadis was born in 1906 in the village Tosie, Asia Minor. He had just finished grade four when his family was exiled from Turkey and sent to Macedonia. Markos was a communist, a tobacco worker and a member of the CPG since 1928. He was a member of the CPG Central Committee since 1942. Second CPG Secretary of Domestic Affairs in Greek occupied Macedonia. Divisional Commissar of ELAS in Greek occupied Macedonia. Later he was military commander and head of the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece during the Greek Civil War. In the CPG Political Bureau Resolution of September 15, 1948, it was said that “Markos Vafiadis, as Commissar of a Group of ELAS divisions in Macedonia, followed a chauvinistic policy towards the Slavo-Macedonian fighters.” (“Neos Kosmos” August 1950. “Ten years of struggle”, p. 470.)

Was Markos Vafiadis a general or a criminal?

After his return to Greece from the USSR (see “Ta Nea” and “Epikera” printed in Athens) there was talk that Markos met with General Tsakalotos in Athens. Tsakalotos was working for the Greek government at the time and later fought against the Partisans during the Greek Civil War. (See “Nova Makedonija”, February 24, 1992.)

General Tsakalotos, as a man and as a warrior, was more human than Markos because he had compassion for the victims of the civil war whereas Markos did not. When Tsakalotos said “I mourn for the victims of the war,” Markos replied, “we fight in this war to kill Macedonians so that we do not lose Macedonia to them!”

This can only mean that General Markos lied to us on an unprecedented scale and at the same time told us that “communists don’t lie”! And what did we do for Markos besides give him our lives? We wrote poetry and songs to glorify him and his deeds! We glorified the very same beast that planned our demise, which brought us to the brink of extinction! There is no doubt about it, Markos Vafiadis was a criminal!

Two Asia Minor colonists, Nikos Zahariadis and Markos Vafiadis, rose to the top in the ranks of the CPG and, with help from the CPY/CPM, NOF and AFZH, lured us Macedonians en masse into the Greek Civil War with lies and false promises and made us sacrifice ourselves so that Greece could displace us and make more room for the Asia Minor colonists who were deposited in Macedonia after the Balkan Wars. This basically sums it up; what happened to us and what the purpose of the Greek Civil War was.

Times have sure changed! We have endured the Greek Civil War, a phenomenon of our consciousness, and the five perilous years of NOF and AFZH being led by Asia Minor colonists in both pillars, political and military.”

Krapov look at me and said: “If we follow the facts and undeniable evidence of what truly happened to the Macedonian people, we will discover that genocide was purposely committed against us.

In that period of time even the “fraternal communist parties” led by the USSR did not want to know the truth; that the Macedonian people were being prepared for genocide.

What I don’t understand is why did we trust the ideological activists of NOF and AFZH, who arrived in the Macedonian villages in April 1945 with directives from Tito, Tempo, Kolishevki and Uzunovski -

Abas preaching to us that we need to ‘spiritually unify’, and that the time was right even though the war (WW II) had just ended and that Yugoslavia stood behind our future struggle?

The NOF and AFZH activists used to say: ‘What the CPG and the CPY are offering must be viewed as a spiritual unification, not as someone’s political background project. This is a great and beautiful moment for all Macedonians in the world and we need to trust the Greek communists!’ This is what our Macedonian ideological activists preached to us.

Then, throughout the course of the war, being blinded by their ideological propaganda, we, like cowards, succumbed to the will of Zahariadis and Markos and became servile and ignorant, forgetting what the Greeks were all about. We were lied to and lured with promises of a better future and somehow we forgot the present. One thing is certain about all this, we wrote a dark chapter for our history. And as such for many years, even decades, at home and in exile, we lived in fear of those who inflicted this evil upon us. And to think that we Macedonians generously and sincerely accepted their slogan and bled for them for years!

We made a grave error when we decided to join the struggle within the ranks of the CPG in order to free Greek occupied Macedonia and unite it with the rest of Macedonia. We were lied to by both Parties: the CPG and CPY (CPM)... It was a terrible thing... and to think that we all knew that the highest guarantee that the CPG could make was give us ‘equality with the Greeks within the framework of Greece’ and nothing more! Anything more than that was empty and meaningless... promises concocted to get us involved in the Greek Civil War, which in the end turned out to be a great big Greek lie.

How can we have been so stupid as to think that we would receive ‘brotherly’ support from the very same people who invaded, occupied and portioned our Macedonia in 1913 and took it for themselves? Worse than that, why did we believe that the very people who had divided our Macedonia were now going to help us reunite it? Even worse than that, how could we have expected to unite our Macedonia after World War II ended? When the war was

over, when everything had been decided and when the rest of the world was looking forward to living in peace?

How can we have been so naïve as to think that a government (Bulgarian, Yugoslav, or Greek) would be so stupid as to arm NOF or any other Macedonian liberation movement and freely give it part of its territory for which it had fought in 1913?

I know that any reasonable person would have said ‘no’ to fraternizing with our occupiers, especially with the so-called ‘fraternal, communist parties’ (CPY and CPG) because it was not in their interest to support us in the creation of a united and independent Macedonia separated from Greece and Yugoslavia. By fraternizing with them, they in fact prevented us from organizing and achieving our aims.

They wanted us to be part of them, especially during the Greek Civil War so that they could control our actions, just like they did with NOF. If we acted independently we were immediately labeled traitors. In the end the CPG labeled the NOF leaders traitors anyway and as such doomed them. The Greeks would have done anything, lie, tell us what we wanted to hear, etc., in order to keep us within reach.

For example, Stavros Karkaletsos, President of the Hellenic Centre for European and International Analysis, once said: ‘I, as a Greek, and many others here believe that the Communist Party of Greece at the time played an anti-Greek role. There was a statement made by Aris Velouhiotis, wartime leader of the Party during the Second World War, that Greece’s borders ended at Mount Olympus.’

Now, why would he say that when clearly it was against his own interests? It was pure propaganda, but for what reason?

Clearly he said it to placate the Macedonians or more precisely to attract the so-called Slavo-Macedonians on the communist side of the Greek Civil War and have them fight against the Greek army. And that’s exactly what happened. All kinds of things were promised but none materialized. It was as if the Greek communists had gotten amnesia because later none remembered or recalled what

they had promised. It was a trick to attract the Macedonians to their side and have them fight against the Athens government. (See: “A century of persecution.”)

Such tricks were used against us by many Greeks including Zahariadis and Markos and also by members of the CPY/CPM, from 1943 to 1949, and especially by Tempo, Kolishevski, Uzunov and other Macedonians. We were also given a label, no doubt by the CPG, CPY/CPM, and we became known as the “Egeitsi” (Aegeans), a hurtful and offensive label for us because we were all patriotic Macedonians. It was scary indeed...” concluded Krapov, who went silent.

I watched the old man in wonderment as he pondered his next move, curious as to what he was going to say next. Then, without warning, he stood up, fixed his white hair with his palm and said: “We had a strange logic here in Kostur: If you were against them not even the river Belitsa could wash away your guilt because you were against the Bands who died protecting Kostur and your native land. Conversely, if you wholeheartedly were for the Communists then you not only advanced their ideas but you were also labeled Internationalist and an internationalist intellectual.

With such an internationalist orientation, a hundred years later, a person from Kostur will feel like a new man, not caring where he belongs while living outside of Kostur. Now scattered around the world, we feel spiritually depleted and go on with our cosmopolitan lives, living only with our memories... But for how many generations?! Will the next generation know or even care to know where it came from? Scary isn't it?

It is incomprehensible even today that we (Macedonian fighters in the ranks of ELAS) actually participated in the destruction of the entire well-organized Kostur Region community when we attacked the 64 Macedonian villages with more than 9,800 armed Macedonian freedom fighters, who bravely stood on guard against Hellenism and protected our people from losing their identity and dignity. Instead of valourizing these fighters as the true guards of our identity and dignity, which in effect were a Macedonian national resistance, we placed a black mark on them and in our history

labeled them with all sorts of ideological labels. But what is truly amazing, the very same people who we labeled ‘traitors and collaborators’ were not only good enough to fight in the new campaign, but left us with a new generation of fighters (all those who remained alive or their sons). Unfortunately, after they were disarmed they too were stuffed in the same trap as the rest of us; they too became the good sons of the Communist Party of Greece...

This phenomenon of freedom fighters, fighting exclusively for the Macedonian cause, appearing in Kostur and in other places in Macedonia at this time and under these circumstances, shows that there is still much respect for our people’s identity and dignity. We respect ourselves and who we are! Unfortunately we have not learned to avoid the traps set for us by outsiders. We have not learned to refrain from being drawn into the political games being played all around us. Believe me when I tell you this... We committed a great sin when we destroyed the Kostur freedom fighters.

Also let me tell you this. If nations in the world existed with roots extending to the very distant past, we would be amongst the first, if not the first to fit that profile. We are Macedonians and we one of the oldest nations in the world. And we still exist... It is a miracle. It is a sin to want to persecute and destroy a miracle... especially the Kostur freedom fighters...

It turned out that every ideology invariably leads to violence and radical thinking. And now this ideological intimacy with double standards turned the Macedonians away from their original objectives and gave them different visions and different yearnings. Of course that was expected with change; a new Party, a new world order... It was a big deal. But the greatest error we made was to surrender our people to strangers, to our historic enemies, under the belief that they would lead us to national freedom.

Throughout the entire period while the war was raging on, we Macedonians were under the spell of the CPY/CPM and the CPG. It was like we all had the same disease. Especially the Macedonians who were members in these parties and who not only wholeheartedly believed what the Parties preached to them but they

excessively propagated their own illusions and were blind to the truth. They were the ones who created the atmosphere of lies which have now lasted more than half a century. They are the ones who covered up our failures and the destruction of the true Macedonian freedom fighters in Kostur. They are the ones who destroyed the Macedonian family and turned us all into world wanderers. They are the ones responsible for us losing our ancestral homes. The unprecedented genocide that befell us is on their hands...” concluded Krapov, sitting down, looking emotionally drained.

Alien ideological strategies and the disorganization of the Macedonian position

Krapov looked at me and said: “Tell me something about the Civil War. Was it true that more than 60% of the participants were Macedonians? What was the purpose of that war? Was its goal really to unite Macedonia?”

I don’t know why Krapov asked me again because I had answered these questions a little earlier in our conversation. At least I thought I had.

“No!” I said. “It was bait planted by the CPG, CPY/CPM” giving him a short answer.

Krapov looked confused as if wanting to say: “That’s all you have to say?”

Feeling awkward I began talking. I felt like I had to tell him everything I knew.

I said: “As history has shown, the Greek Civil War was filled with much cruelty against the Macedonian people living in Greek occupied Macedonia as this cruelty and deadly games were led and played by the then leaders of the Left, especially those of the CPG, the CPY headed by Tito. It was done for the benefit of their countries.

This many years later and after spending half a century feeling like prisoners, for us the Greek Civil War can be generally assessed as

objective, but only if we analyze NOF and AFZH's goals and results from a neutral standpoint, which will then show that it was a closed circle tragedy. And I will tell you why!

This phenomenon called the 'Greek Civil War' was not only pure genocide to ethnically cleanse Greek occupied Macedonia of its Macedonian population but it was a means of making it look legal and moral from the Greek side, which resulted in our silence for more than half a century. What did we want? We wanted our Macedonia, which was stolen from us, to be given back to us. We wanted to be Macedonians; exactly what we are! No more and no less! Were these not noble deeds? Why then did it turn out that we were the bad guys who had to suffer and keep silent about it for half a century?

NOF and AFZH's objectives, which were then closely linked with the ideology of world globalization, were changed depending on which client and in whose hands NOF and AFZH's fate belonged, the CPG or the CPY/CPM. As a result NOF and AFZH's achievements were extremely disappointing. Not only did we lose many people, we lost our Macedonian primordial homeland forever. Not only were there no guarantees demanded by NOF and AFZH to ensure our postwar survival, but they also failed to stop the "Pedomazoma" from taking place, which was no less than political terror against the Macedonian children. Because no such guarantees were made, for our (self) sacrifices in the Greek Civil War, we were rewarded with a one way ticket out of our homeland.

The guilt is ours to bear...

After World War II ended it was more than clear that the Greek Civil War was started by the communist regime, or more precisely by Zahariadis, Tito and Stalin. But it became an interesting combination when demagogy and daily politics were merged in historiography where the dual historical reality was recklessly distorted in the belief that the Greek Civil War (1945 - 1949) was an epic, a historical event for us Macedonians. But if we analyze the facts, we will find that NOF and AFZH were preoccupied, according to some political plan, with using systematic propaganda in order to mobilize the Macedonian people, through lies and deceit, to join the

war. The Macedonian people were never asked if they wanted a war, they were simply led to join this strange conflict with false promises. We Macedonians should also bear much of the guilt for allowing strangers to take our children away from us. This act alone sealed the fate of the Macedonian family in Greek occupied Macedonia forever. Is there anyone, any member of NOF and AFZH who can explain why it was necessary to have this war?

Much of our historiography today is artificially constructed to include Greek and foreign ideological determination: ELAS, EAM, Chetniks, martial institutions in Aegean Macedonia, etc. This brazenly falsified historiography is specifically designed to keep the Macedonian reader confused and in the dark regarding Macedonia's history and the reality of this war. We were a small nation of people living in Greece and had no means of getting help from the outside, not even from Macedonians living in other countries... because it was a pointless war. We should have used our brains and hearts, our intellect to demonstrate to the world that we needed help, not arms. What did we expect would happen when we picked up guns and started shooting? How did we think the Greeks, even the whole world, were going to react to our armed aggression, especially after the war (WW II) had ended and people were looking forward to living in peace?

I am sorry to say this friend but we too are guilty of many sins...

Now let me ask you this: 'By participating in this war did we cause the loss of our ethnic and historical status in Greek occupied Macedonia? Did we help the Greeks achieve their objectives to get rid of us once and for all?!' Think about it! What did NOF and AFZH achieve by dragging us into a senseless war with no safeguards for our lives or future in our country? Very disappointing!

Passing through the phases of time, NOF and AFZH first served under the CPM/CPY and then under the CPG during which time many mistakes were made, which turned out to be detrimental to our people. Knowingly or unknowingly, what was done eventually led to our defeat and destruction. NOF and AFZH (CPM), by their own actions, proved that they were created without a clear political

philosophy of their own, which was vital to the interests of the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia. This was confirmed not only by the outcome of events, but also by how Macedonians were treated. For example, while we were supposedly equals to the Greeks we were being referred to as ‘Slavo-Macedonians’; not what we wanted to be called but what the Greeks wanted to call us. We were referred to as ‘Slavo-Macedonians’ against our will, which left deep psychological wounds in the collective consciousness and souls of the Macedonian people living in Greek occupied Macedonia. What kind of equality was that? And why did NOF and AFZH not object to it? Probably the most painful thing to this day is the fact that even though we were led into oblivion and lost many lives and our homes, NOF, AFZH, CPM and the CNG fiercely defended their actions as justified. After the war many people thought that there was no justice in this world,” I said.

By now Krapov was no longer listening to me. He seemed as if he was deep in his own thoughts so I stopped talking.

FREE GREECE MILITARY NEWS: Greek Civil War ends on August 29/30, 1949.

DAG units have moved to Albania. They are being disarmed by Albanian authorities and placed in the Bureli and Elbasan camps. From October 1st to 5th, 1949 members of the Macedonian NOF and AFZH leadership, by order from the CPG and DAG General Headquarters, were being arrested under accusations from the CPG that they were Tito’s agents.

Greek Civil War brings Macedonian families countless tragedies

Krapov looked at me as if he wondered why I had stopped talking. This was my cue to continue, so I said:

“Five years of war, Macedonian families destroyed, homes abandoned, villages burned down... only churches remain standing... silent witnesses to a great tragedy... but do we Macedonians know any more than this about what happened, why it happened and who was behind this tragedy... this has been our fate! Unfortunately, the powers to be made sure that the time for finding

the truth had stopped while our slavery continued... While the red storm was muted, the dirty slogans silenced... the call to escape intensified and we began to think dark thoughts... what had these ideological activists done to us? And then wondered: "Will we now lose our native hearth?!" This was genocide... and this is what the communists have done to us!

If there was any justice in that world it was for the strong. In other words there was only justice for those who willed power and in this case it was the communists. There was no fairness... only strength... and that's what mattered then and nothing else. The same is true today... So, were our strategists in the CPM, NOF and AFZH not aware of what had already been decided by the Great Powers and by Macedonia's neighbours when they went looking for an alternate solution for us Macedonians?! Why did these organizations wait for others, outsiders, to create a future for us? Were they not capable? If not then why did they accept to lead us? Why did they play a role in turning us into victims of the CPG? On top of that, why did they allow the history of this war to be falsified and for the truth and our future to be erased?

In the half century or so that has passed since the war ended many so-called intellectuals, if we can call them that, have been engaged in discussions about this war, both in political and general forums, but all they have done is apologize for the political powers, sometimes putting their own intellectual creed in question. Some were lost in the daily political waters in which they lost their intellectual virtues in favour of demagogy. But there were also those groups which worked in accordance with the needs of their clients and their lucrative goals and needs. From time to time these groups affirmed and praised some ideas and in different situations they were its fiercest critics. These groups, filled with unfulfilled ambitions, actively participated in the division of political power but because of their own failures were constantly filled with anger, jealousy and nihilism.

And how did the communists in Bureli solve and bury the Macedonian Question?

Let me say that they did it in the presence of the highest CPG communist leadership, in front of Grigori Petrov, a high representative of the USSR and member of the Information Bureau, in front of DAG General Headquarters staff and all the fighters (Greeks and Macedonians) who bled for four years fighting in the Greek Civil War. They did it in front of members of NOF and AFZH and in front of a number of senior representatives belonging to the Communist Party of Albania.

Was this then a strategy to drive the Macedonians out of Greece?!" I asked.

Unexpectedly Krapov looked at me and said: "Yes! Yes, but that was not all. That was not the end!"

"Here is a chronology of events," I said.

"Two days after being placed in the camps in Albania, the NOF and AFZH Macedonian leaders were labeled Tito and Kolishevski's bandits. All of us DAG fighters were stunned by the news. We knew nothing about this during the course of the war."

Krapov interrupted and said: "Well, this is how the communist system worked. It worked conspiratorially, secretly! Do you understand?"

"If that were so," I said "why then did they all pretend to be naïve?! False heroes and victims... The Macedonians have no one to blame but themselves. They decided to become servents of the strategic policy implemented in Yugoslavia and wanted to have influence over the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia.

The moment we arrived at the camps, security organs under the leadership of General Dimitrios Vlandas and Periklis Mirovlitis, the officers in charge of intelligence activities at the DAG General Headquarters in Bureli Camp, began searching all the camps looking to capture and arrest Tito's agents.

From October 1st to October 5th, 1949, arrested were:

1. Paskal Mitrevski, president of NOF. And as I have said before, NOF and AFZH were established in the CPM Central Committee Headquarters in Skopje on April 23, 1945. All NOF and AFZH members were selected by Mitrevski's design. Mitrevski did that after he returned from Belgrade where he stayed for several months and received instructions from CPY Central Committee authorized personnel. He chose the following people: Pavle Rakovski, Mincho Fotev, Vera - Evdokia Baleva, Urania Urukova, Tashko Hadzhianev, Lazar Poplazarov, Hristo Kolentsev, Lambro Cholakov, Mihail Maliov and Themistoklis Leokratis.

The next day, October 3, 1949, the above mentioned people were arrested and placed in a joint jail cell. There they asked each other why they had been detained. They had never done anything that would be hostile towards the CPG? They had always acted on CPG orders, which included organizing the Macedonian people and getting them to fight for the CPG and for world freedom en masse? They pushed the Macedonian peasants to give everything they had for this holy struggle? They had even agreed to evacuate their children so that the women could enter the ranks of DAG? They were completely puzzled by the actions that the CPG took.

The CPG was the stepmother who they earnestly loved!

Like Umbero Eko once said: 'I now began to believe that the whole world was a secret, a harmless secret, which became a horror when I attempted to interpret it as well-hidden truth' ..."

Krapov interrupted me again and said: "The Macedonian communists from NOF and AFZH are now saying that they loved the CPG like it was their Party, and as such throughout the entire course of the war they preached its politics to the Macedonian people. They sincerely loved the CPG like a stepmother."

I looked at Krapov and said: "Were these people trying to be naïve on purpose or were they truly subjects of the CPY and the CPG?! If the Macedonians from NOF and AFZH did not do what they were told to do by the CPY and CPG or as they said: 'We only acted on the orders of the CPG when our assignment was to mass organize the Macedonian people in the struggle', we would not have been

expelled from our homeland! And as Jean Jacques Rousseau, a French philosopher, once said: ‘There is no madness from which a person cannot escape, except from vanity.’

But what do statements like these, made by Vera and the others, tell us? They tell us that there was a strand of self-defeat amongst our Macedonian communists. In other words, the people of NOF and AFZH worked for strangers, for the designers of the war who planned to rid of us from our homeland. And as it turned out it was all done against the interests of the Macedonian people!

Now they were pretending to be naïve and fear made them wonder: ‘What will become of us?...’ Fear and horror preoccupied the leaders of NOF and AFZH as they sat in the jail.

The next day, October 4, 1949, General Vlandas looked at them angrily and said: ‘Write down about Tito and Kolishevski’s band!’

He wanted a statement from each one of them so he said: ‘Write, write about your dirty deeds.’ And as such each of the detainees was obliged to give a statement.

A great gathering involving all the DAG fighters was called for October 7, 1949. More than 3,000 people showed up. Among them were members of the CPG Politburo, members of DAG General Staff, CPG General Secretary Nikos Zahariadis, Foreign Minister of the Provisional Government Petros Rosos and members of General Headquarters. Included among the top officials and Politburo members were Vassilis Brdzhiotas, Michos Vlandas, Georgios Gusias and Periklis Mirovlitis (who later published a book in Poland entitled “Tito and his clique’s betrayal of Greece”.)

CPG General Secretary Nikos Zahariadis delivered a bitter speech. A few years later Zahariadis hung himself in a prison cell in the city Surgun in Siberia.

For the benefit of everyone, among other things, Nikos Zahariadis said: ‘During our holy war all these people here were under CPY influence and played a treacherous role... there is no place for traitors in our ranks.’

If we further analyze these allegations we will find that there were dirty foreign political games played over the Macedonian people.

First, the Ideological activism carried out by NOF and AFZH in order to get the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia, during the years 1945 to 1949, to massively rise and fight was a Yugoslav initiative.

Then we hear from Vera, leader of the AFZH organization, telling Zahariadis that: ‘The Communist Party of Greece is my Party!’

So what exactly was NOF and AFZH’s ideological conception, in comparison to that of the CPG, if all the time they made compromises to it?

When we, the Macedonian fighters of DAG, first heard of this, that these people were Tito’s agents, we stood there with our mouths open, we were in shock. It was even more shocking that the CPG made them responsible for us Macedonians and before each battle they assured us that our death for this struggle was sacred because the Macedonian people would live free.

In other words, if we want to look for the root of this evil in all this then we will be faced with two questions... to which we should seek answers.

1. How and why did Tito and the CPY activate the Macedonian syndrome and push the Macedonian people on the ideological red gallows in 1945 to 1949?!

2. How did Zhariadis and the CPG manipulate Macedonian people through the hell of the red gallows?!

At the conclusion of the indictments; the security authorities immediately jailed the NOF and AFZH leaders in the Bureli jail where they remained until December 1949.

Then, between December 15 and 16, 1949, they were loaded on the ship Michurin and shipped from Albania to the USSR. Following a ruling from the USSR Supreme Court they were then sent to Siberia to serve their sentences in the Siberian camps.

At the same time, the villages in our homeland were turned into a wasteland as the population was expelled and found itself roaming the world.

Think about this. Think how well-planned and executed this matrix of genocide was over the Macedonian population. You can clearly see it as it happened to those who were convicted. They had no clue what was happening to them; they had no idea that this was perpetrated by both the CPY and the CPG.”

Krapov turned to me and again said: “Well, this is how the communist system operated. Secretly! Strictly secretly! Do you understand now? By this means everything that happened to us and our leadership was designed to have two versions.”

No sooner had he finished talking than Krapov again went into one of his trances, preoccupied with his thoughts no doubt, trying to make sense of things. Then suddenly he looked at me and said: “Regarding Vera, leader of the organization AFZH and her relationship with Zahariadis; Vera paid careful attention to Zahariadis and idolized him but with caution. Zahariadis, on the other hand, also paid careful attention to Vera but with a dose of compassion like a good and conscientious friend. But now he could not wait to accuse her of having done cruel things and put her in jail.

At every encounter and every time he parted with the leaders of NOF and AFZH, Zahariadis always left with an ironic malice,” concluded Krapov.

In reply I said to Krapov: “Why then did they all pretend to be naïve, was that not hypocritical?”

Krapov thought for a moment and said: “A person does not need to be very smart to understand that the Macedonian Communists, the stigmatized ones, always pretended to be very naïve but,

nonetheless, indirectly they were responsible for the organized genocide against us. How can they have been both guilty and brave when, together with Zahariadis, they played naïve; they all did the same thing, both the accused and the accusers, they were led by Zahariadis who a few years later hung himself in prison. Those on our side meanwhile, while serving their sentences in Alma Ata, went before Khrushchev asking him for a visa to return to Yugoslavia and told Khrushchev that they were Yugoslav Communists!

What kind of perfidious games were they all playing? Yugoslav Communists?! There had to be some sort of agreement between Tito and the CPY/CPM on one side and Zahariadis and the CPG on the other. The situation they were in was well-known after the Second World War,” concluded Krapov.

Now let us look at some facts and arguments.

1. The Yalta Conference lasted from February 4th to 11th, 1945. It was attended by the leaders Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt, in the presence of their ministers of external affairs. Greece was placed under the British and American sphere of influence. Stalin gave them this guarantee in Yalta, which means that no socialist system would be allowed to take root in Greece, not even with a Civil War. So, what was the civil war all about then; if not to ethnically cleanse the Macedonian population in Greek occupied Macedonia? The Greek Civil War was started to legalize this process in order to get rid of the Macedonians from Greece and to make more space for the Turkish colonists and settlers from Asia Minor who were already settled in Macedonia.

2. At the same time, let us look at how the British and the Americans viewed the situation in Greece with regards to the Macedonians.

British Ambassador to Athens, Mr. R.A. Leeper, back in November 1944, toyed with the idea of displacing 120,000 Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia and moving them north of the Greek border. Mr. Leeper suggested this to Mr. Eden, then UK Foreign Minister, in a letter dated November 24, 1944 in which, among other things, he wrote ‘... and since the amputation of the Slav areas in

Western Macedonia and their annexation to a Slav Federation is a practical impossibility and would also be economically disastrous for Greece, it would follow that, difficult as it may be, a home must be found for perhaps 120,000 Slav Macedonians north of the Greek frontiers of 1941.’ (5a) (See: FO 371/43649 XP 00201 R 20431/1009/67.)

Yes. During the war and during the half century after the war we never asked: ‘Why did Britain and the United States support the Greek injustices perpetrated against Macedonia and the Macedonian people?’

3. Marshal Tito, in an interview with ‘The New York Times’ in Moscow on April 26, 1945, among other things, said: ‘If the Macedonians in Greece express a desire to unite with other Macedonians, Yugoslavia will respect their wishes.’

4. Perfidious games played by Zahariadis and Tito with regards to starting the Greek Civil War.

(Moscow – Belgrade - the CPG)

(The following facts reveal key moments in NOF’s history - from the military archives: USSR, Yugoslavia and the CPG)

March 20, 1946 - Zahariadis left Athens and went to Prague. He used this trip as an opportunity to discuss his armed struggle in Greece with the communist party leaders and to seek assistance from them. But, as it turned out, he received silence or advice that it was a bad idea to start a war at this point in time and that such a move would be foolish. The most notable leaders, including Toren of France and Togliatti of Italy, told him that it was ‘dangerous to resort to arms’ at this point in time. Georgi Dimitrov asserted that ‘the international situation does not allow an outbreak of a new armed conflict, especially one that would directly interfere in the affairs of the Western allies in the Balkans’.

All those leaders knew very well that Zahariadis had returned to Athens in May 1945, after being imprisoned in the Dachau Camp in Germany for nine years, which had left a strong impression on him

and gave him a new attitude towards the world. He returned to Greece on a British plane and, immediately after returning, took up his former duties as CPG Secretary General and began to work.

Zahariadis laid out his Party's aspiration for the newspaper 'Rizospastis' by saying that the CPG 'never attempted to seize power against the wishes of the people and he had never had to pursue a course of action against the Trotskyites, anarchists and idiots'.

At the same time the communist party leaders knew that 'Aris Veluhiotis' was the 'symbol of Greek guerrilla' whom Zahariadis publicly reprimanded by referring to him as an 'adventurer' who, with his 'reckless behaviour', prompted the Right to attack the Left. Subsequently, following this, he was expelled from the Party and shortly afterwards was killed by the Right.

But during his meetings in Prague, Zahariadis did receive much information about Marshal Josip Broz Tito who, 'after his successful guerrilla movement in Yugoslavia, had aims at expanding the revolution all over the Balkans'.

Disappointed by the reception he received in Prague, Zahariadis, on his way back, decided to pay Tito a visit in Belgrade.

Zahariadis was well-received by Tito who communicated with him in Russian and, after toasting him, Tito asked Zahariadis: 'What do you think about the future of the Balkans?' To which Zahariadis replied: 'Marshall, that's why I come to you, being urged by many leaders who have much respect for you and for your success with the guerrilla movement in Yugoslavia.' Zahariadis then went into a detailed explanation in regard to the political situation in Greece, emphasizing that the people were ready to fight and take power away from the Anglo-American imperialists.

Unable to hide his excitement, Tito, feeling comfortable being surrounded by his subordinates, Rankovich, Kardelli, Dzhilas, Tempo, Kolishevski and others, said: 'Life does not go back, it moves forward. Revolutions bring progress in society and develop productive forces. On behalf of the Communist Party and the

people, I promise you extensive assistance and whatever is needed to organize an Army. You know that after World War II, we immediately thought of starting a revolution but even today in Aegean Macedonia the same revolutionary power exists in the citizens of Greece, the Macedonians. They are led by our experienced centres and have a long revolutionary tradition. We are willing to put under your command those forces and the forces available in the Bulkesh Camp.’

Tito then turned to Kulishevski and said: ‘Lazo, take notes and do everything to bring those forces together under the motto ‘brotherhood and unity’ and put them under the authority of the CPG who it can use in its revolution.’

Here are the notes dictated for Kulishevski by Tito:

a/ NOF and AFZH are to break away from you (CPM) and be attached to the CPG. Do not get involved and do not give mixed orders on how to fight. Do not tell them to fight for a united Macedonia. And of course change their program goals and lead them to accept the CPG program goals;

b/ NOF is to form a central authority that will answer and report to a CPG Regional Committee;

c/ Put the armed Macedonian units in Aegean Macedonia under the command of military officers who are under the command of the CPG.

‘But all this Comrade Nikos,’ said Tito, ‘will have to be approved by the old man, Generalissimo Stalin before we can act on such a revolution.’ But Tito already knew that Stalin was in the mood to cause trouble for the capitalists and was sure he would accept Zahariadis’s proposal.

Zahariadis excitedly then said: ‘I am ready to take this to the Generalissimo and get his approval’.

‘Here’s to the future of the revolution!’ said Tito, continuing, ‘Be determined, not afraid, don’t be afraid of casualties and overcome all

difficulties, so you will succeed in your intentions. That's what a revolution calls for! Grab everything firmly in your hands and, with great certainty, you can count on us!

5. Why conceal the arrested? Who formed and imported NOF and AFZH and what tasks were they given when they were returned to Greek occupied Macedonia? With these organizations we created a political family of Macedonians, and with the existence of such a family it was much easier for the strategists to control the Macedonian population. Vera, the leader of the AFZH organization, confirmed this when she said her job was to follow CPG directives. Macedonian participation in the Greek Civil War gave the Greek government more reason to ruthlessly persecute the Macedonian population in Greek occupied Macedonia. (See: Makedontsite niz pekolut na tsrvenoto gubilishte-Istrazhuaniето na voeno istoriskopolitichka studia od K.S, 2007.)

Created in Skopje on April 23, 1945, NOF and AFZH were Macedonian organizations. AFZH was a strictly women's organization and unique only to Macedonian women. There was no equivalent Greek organization! Why? NOF and AFZH were created under the leadership of the CPY/CPM, Tito and Kulishevski and introduced by Tsvetko Uzunovski - Abas (7) Organizing Secretary of the CPM Central Committee and Interior Minister of The People's Republic of Macedonia. At one point Abas said to the NOF and AFZH leadership: '... Yugoslavia has become the Centre of the revolution in the Balkans. The Macedonian question has now become a Yugoslav question on account that the CPY formed the organizations NOF, AFZH and NOMS in Aegean Macedonia and placed you in charge to lead them. These organizations have been tasked to give the Macedonian people in Aegean Macedonia a Yugoslav orientation. The Macedonian people and the Macedonian movements are now led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia will get their full recognition and acceptance within a Federal Yugoslavia and Aegean Macedonia will join Yugoslavia.' (AM. Macedonian Archives. F-20/276, F-20/196.)

6. After NOF and AFZH were created their members received a new lesson from Kulishevski.

Right after the CPY and CPG agreed on what to do regarding the continuation of the war in Greek Occupied Macedonia, Lazar Kolishevski, Secretary of the CPM Central Committee, invited the NOF Board, headed by Paskal Mitrevski, for a briefing during which Kolishevski said the following: ‘Now you go down there (in Greek occupied Macedonia). The CPG is now responsible for you. You must have faith in the CPG. Its policy on the Macedonian question is clear. Any questions that may surface will now be decided by the leadership of the CPG Party. Be careful not to splinter or stray from the Party. You are to work under its directives. You are to struggle and fight to strengthen your unity with the Greek people and fight hard with all your strength against chauvinism, separatism and localized tendencies.’

7. Convicted by the CPG, after they returned to the Republic of Macedonia from Siberia the NOF and AFZH leadership was welcomed back with music and marching bands. Macedonia recognized their contribution and demanded from the Soviet Union that they be permitted to leave and return to the Republic of Macedonia. The Macedonians said that these people were Yugoslav communists. With the exception of some leaders like P. Rakovski, who did not even receive a grave, most NOF and AFZH leaders were given apartments to live in and jobs in the public sector. But all this was forgotten when we, the ordinary DAG fighters, returned to the Republic of Macedonia. The first place they sent us upon our return was to ‘Idrizovo’ Prison. The UDBA sieve caught us and sent us to prison. After enduring a horrific war, being exiled from our homes and being shuffled in foreign lands, we were so happy to return home to Macedonia, to where we felt like we belonged only to find out that there too we were not wanted! The ideological matrix had funny laws and played strange games, particularly when it came to strategic options between Tito and Zahariadis’s Left forces. The reader can find out more about this in the book: “Tito and his clique’s betrayal of Greece”, mentioned earlier.

Krapov was quiet for a while now so I decided to break the silence. I said: The genocide perpetrated against the Macedonian people living in Greek occupied Macedonia was no accident, it was deliberate and by design... That’s how the powers to be wanted it, but the saddest

thing about all this is that it was carried out with our assistance but without our knowledge. Instead of thinking about what we were doing, we simply acted on orders from others, from strangers who brought us our demise...

Five years of struggle for alien aims for which we received nothing in return except for our exile.

We the Macedonians in the DAG units fought in every battle and were exposed to all kinds of danger, more so than any of the Greeks, and in the end we lost our homes, we were exiled from our place of birth for which we were ready to give our lives.

And now, more than half a century later, we forgot why we fought and who pushed us into the Greek Civil War. Why has history been silent about this tragedy?

I remember reading something that Pavle Rakovski wrote some time ago. It went something like this: ‘On January 10, 1955, while serving our sentences in the corrections labour camps in Eastern Siberia, Irkutskaya Region, we were tossed into a cell where they tossed social outcasts from many nations from Asia Minor and Europe. There were also fanatics from various religious sects; considered the enemy of Soviet power...’ (See: Pavle Rakovski’s “My suffering”, p 174.) Rakovski did not even get his own grave after he died in Skopje. He was fingered by his own comrades maybe because he wrote a letter to the USSR Supreme Court asking why he was jailed. Why were he and the Macedonian people at fault and found guilty of crimes when this entire strategy and the Greek Civil War were designed by the CPY/CPM and by the CPG?

The fatal path we Macedonians, from Greek occupied Macedonia, took was a result of being led by the Left forces, in whose hands we entrusted our lives from 1924 to 1950.

Είναι γνωστό ότι με βάση τις κομμουνιστικές αντιλήψεις, η αναγνώριση της ύπαρξης ενός συγκεκριμένου έθνους ισοδυναμεί στην πράξη με την αναγνώριση του δικαιώματος αυτοδιάθεσης του έθνους αυτού.

It is accepted that on the basis of communist knowledge and understanding, there is recognition of a particular nationality which exists in practice, and with that recognition in the first place there can be self-determination for this nationality. (Document from the CPG archives.)

Στη βάση αυτή, το ΚΚΕ (3ο Έκτακτο Συνέδριο [26/11 - 3/12/1924], υιοθέτησε τη σχετική απόφαση του 5ου Συνεδρίου της Κομμουνιστικής Διεθνούς (Μόσχα, 17/6 – 8/7/1924) και μιλούσε [το ΚΚΕ] για καταπιεζόμενες [από την Ελλάδα] εθνικές μειονότητες και για “ανεξάρτητη Μακεδονία και Θράκη” !!

On the basis of this, the CPG (3rd Extraordinary Congress (26/11-3/12, 1924) adopted a resolution during the 5th Communist International Congress (Moscow, 17/6 - 8/7, 1925) and debated (CPG) about the acknowledgement (in Greece) of minorities and an “Independent Macedonia and Thrace”!!

Τον Δεκέμβριο του 1935 (6ο Συνέδριο), το ΚΚΕ επικύρωσε την απόφαση της ηγεσίας του [Απρίλιος 1935] για ‘αντικατάσταση’ (καιροσκοπική, ωστόσο, προσωρινού χαρακτήρα και μηδέποτε ουσιαστικώς εφαρμοσθείσα!...) του παραπάνω συνθήματος με το σύνθημα “πλήρια ισοτιμία στις μειονότητες”....

In December 1935 (6th Congress) the CPG top leadership confirmed the adopted resolution (April 1935) with a “change” (making it temporary and as such it was never actually realized!) to the above slogan: “Full equality for minorities...”

Σε συνέντευξή του στην Αγγλίδα δημοσιογράφο Elisabeth Barker το 1946, ο Ζαχαριάδης είχε δηλώσει: “... τα ζητήματα των συνόρων του Βορρά έπρεπε να διευθετηθούν με βάση την αυτοδιάθεση...”

In an interview he gave to the English journalist Elizabeth Barker in 1946, Zahariadis said: “... the questions about northern borders should be regulated based on the self-division of the population”.

Είναι σχεδόν βέβαιο πλέον ότι χωρίς την αποφασιστική (καθοριστικής σημασίας) στήριξή του από τη Γιουγκοσλαβία, το

ΚΚΕ δεν θα τολμούσε τότε να εξωθήσει τα πράγματα ως την εμφύλια ρήξη.

There is no doubt that without getting a definite decision and support from Yugoslavia, the CPG would not have dared ask the questions and start the civil conflict.

Εξίσου βέβαιο φαίνεται ότι ο Τίτο δεν θα είχε παράσχει την στήριξη αυτή, αν προηγουμένως ο Ζαχαριάδης δεν είχε δηλώσει ρητά στο Βελιγράδι ότι το ΚΚΕ είναι σαφώς υπέρ της αυτοδιάθεσης των Σλαβομακεδόνων, η οποία βεβαίως εξυπηρετούσε απολύτως τη μακροπρόθεσμη γιουγκοσλαβική πολιτική στο “Μακεδονικό”, δηλαδή την απόσχιση της [ελληνικής] “Μακεδονίας του Αιγαίου” και τη συνένωσή της με τη γιουγκοσλαβική Μακεδονία...

It is also clear that Tito would not have had motive for support, if not for this motto, if Zahariadis had not stated clearly and categorically to Belgrade that the CPG was quite clear on its position regarding the self-determination of the Slavo-Macedonians and that statement undoubtedly served to further promote Yugoslav politics in terms of the “Macedonian Question”, which meant (Greek) consent for the “Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia” to unite with Yugoslav Macedonia.

Κι αν επιπλέον ληφθεί υπόψιν ότι οι Σλαβομακεδόνες αποτελούσαν μέχρι και τα 3/5 [14.000 στις 25.000!!] του ΔΣΕ (αρχές 1949), είναι πολύ δύσκολο να μην οδηγηθεί κανείς στο συμπέρασμα ότι άξονας και καταλύτης του Εμφυλίου υπήρξε η αξιοποίηση (εκμετάλλευση;) από το ΚΚΕ του πόθου των Σλαβομακεδόνων για την ‘εθνική αποκατάστασή’ τους.

And if you take into consideration that the Slavo-Macedonians represented somewhere around 3/5 (14,000 to 25,000) of DAG (early 1949), it is very difficult for someone not to come to the conclusion that the motive was to destroy them, the CPG made profound use of them during the Civil War but the wishes of the Slavo-Macedonians always remained constant; “Independent Macedonia and national establishment”.

Μετά τη ρήξη Τίτο – Στάλιν και τη ‘σύνταξη’ του ΚΚΕ με τον δεύτερο, η 5η Ολομέλεια (Αλβανία, 30 – 31 Ιανουαρίου 1949) υποσχόταν, ως γνωστόν, στους Σλαβομακεδόνες “πλήρη εθνική αποκατάσταση”. Όχι, πλέον, στην αγκαλιά του Τίτο και της διευρυμένης “Μακεδονίας” του, αλλά αυτή τη φορά στα πλαίσια μιας [βουλγαρικής και πάλι εμπνεύσεως] ανεξάρτητης Μακεδονίας που θα συμπεριελάμβανε και τα 3 τμήματα (ελληνικό, γιουγκοσλαβικό, βουλγαρικό) της Μακεδονίας, μιας κατασκευής σαφώς αντι-Τιτικής.

After the Tito-Stalin collision, the CPG “reaction” to Stalin and the 5th Plenum (Albania, January 30 to 31, 1949), the promise, as was known to the Slavo-Macedonians for “complete national establishment”, was no longer in the arms of Tito and neither was the “unification with the People’s Republic of Macedonia”, but this time it was for (Bulgaria with inspiration) a single Macedonia, which would contain the 3 parts (Greek, Yugoslav, Bulgarian) of Macedonia; a new and definitely anti-Tito construction.

Chapter five – The secret flame of our ancestors

1. Commander Bai Kolio; a tall man with broad shoulders and a wide chest, but with a sensitive and gentle personality, was walking tall and dignified not like an ordinary man. He looked tough with his weathered and wounded face. He was wounded by an Andart bullet which left a scar and a permanent, seemingly ironic smile on his face. He exuded a strange but attractive firmness and was a lover of the Kostur – Kureshtan nature. He is a very capable leader who knows how to thrill his fighters with only a few words and to make them proud of fighting alongside him. He only lives for them and they know that. He has dedicated the last years of his life and his health to be a Kostur freedom fighter. He is dedicated and fights bravely for the Macedonian cause and is historically bound to Macedonia's fate. He lives only for Macedonia's freedom.

After graduating from the Kostur Gymnasium, Bai Kolio, being praised by Lazar Pop Traikov, Director of the Gymnasium, embarked on the idea of freeing Macedonia, so he became a revolutionary, a freedom fighter and a romantic idealist, a lover of revolutionary ideas which captivated him until his death. For years since the Greeks occupied Macedonia he waged a fierce struggle to unite his scattered Kostur fighters.

Bai Kolio once said: "Courage is that which does not allow patience and injustices, which raises the voice and in the face of it reveals the truth of power." And those who stood before Bai Kolio were Andarts, ELAS fighters... all ornamented with modern arms and ammunition and paid to fight by our conquerors and occupiers who have no humanity towards our bare-handed Macedonian people.

And what have historians written about the heroic endeavour of these Ilinden descendants? Nothing!

Speaking about the rich village Chetirok in Kostur Region, Krapov said: "During the Ottoman occupation the village Chetirok had a population of 360 Macedonians and 440 Turks. After the Turks left, in their place, the Greek state brought about 550 colonists and settlers from Pond and Asia Minor and settled them there.

One day, I think it was January 11, 1944, over night, military units from the ELAS 9th Division, under the command of Colonel Vassilios Ganakas (Himaros) who commanded through Pind Military Headquarters and Major Aristotelis Houtouras (Arianos) who commanded the Vicho Region ELAS units, attacked the village Chetirok, which then was considered to be the nucleus of the Macedonian freedom fighters.

Even at the entrance to the village, we greeted them with stiff resistance. Guns were blazing and machine guns were firing endlessly with crossfire from a local company, which totaled no more than 150 armed freedom fighters from the village Chetirok and from the surrounding villages, led by Commanders Pando Makriev, President of the Kostur Macedonian Committee, Kostandin Popantonov, Mihail Novachev and the young and brave commanders Vasil Delev, Kosta Kachaunov, Nikola Poprosharov, Naum Shopov, Lazo Zhabov, Sotir Mavrov and other brave and decisive freedom fighters who were willing to defend their property and the freedom of Macedonia in the face of a large number of ELAS fighters.

We were all energized by the heroism of our commander Nikola Dobroliski (Bai Kolio) and his successor Trpo Georgiev. Trpo Georgiev was born in 1883 in the village Chetirok and was a member of the IMRO. Also included on the Board were Krsto Krstevsk, Risto Krashov Aliov, Vangel Buzov, Done Poprasharov and Paskal Paskalichin.

After Nikola Dobrolitski's death it was Kuzo Dimitrov's turn to take his place but Kuzo recommended Trpo Georgiev for the job, so Georgiev became Commander of the Kostur – Kostenaria Region.

With their heroic and decisive attack, the freedom fighters quickly repelled the numerically superior ELAS units and, at one point, pushed them back so hard that they withdrew to Gramos Mountain in panic.

Two Macedonian freedom fighters were killed, five wounded and fifteen villagers were captured in this uneven battle.

Commander Arianos on the ELAS side became increasingly furious with each passing day. Then some time later he decided to attack again, this time with a much larger ELAS force but not before organizing some parts of the population to burn down houses en masse.

After defeating the Macedonian freedom fighting company which then left the village, the ELAS fighters killed 1 person and wounded 14 others. From the great hatred and anger they had against the Macedonian population, the ELAS fighters burned the houses of many of those brave men who fought to protect the lives and property of their people.

During the course of the battle many Macedonian freedom fighters from the neighbouring villages Tikveni, Izglibe, Dobrolishta, Maniak and Kostur came to the rescue and again pushed the ELAS units to retreat back to the mountains. In the fierce fire fight, defending his neighbours, young Petre, son of the legendary Commander Bai Kolio, was killed. It was said that when news of this reached the bloodthirsty Greek fighters of ELAS, they celebrated and called for the enslavement and death of every freedom fighter in Macedonia. These bloodthirsty Greeks and a few Macedonians among them showed their loyalty to Greece when they swore that: 'If we are ordered by the Party we will do it! (Kill every Macedonian freedom fighter)'.

The older Macedonians used to say: 'After Macedonia was divided, three kinds of patriotism emerged among the Macedonians. We all bowed our heads and replaced Ottoman slavery with a Greek one, but because the Greeks were Christians we thought they would treat us better than the Turks...' I recall asking my grandparents: 'Why did you accept Greek slavery?' and they answered me by saying: 'This is our homeland from time immemorial, this too will pass and the Greeks will leave just like the Turks did!'

One thing about all this is clear, drastic measures were taken against the descendants of those who fought in the Ilinden Uprising. The freedom fighters in the Ilinden days fought for Macedonia's liberation from Ottoman slavery and now in the 1940's their descendants were fighting against Greek slavery.

The Communists were asking themselves: ‘What can we do next?’ Are these ‘little reasons’ enough cause to anger the Macedonians? But then and there we, the Macedonians on the communist side, did nothing to oppose the communists. Instead of standing up to them, we propagated the idea that ELAS and the communists could and should be trusted...

Gradually more and more escalating attacks were carried out against prominent Macedonian families, looking to rob and degrade them, calling them ‘Ilinden dogs’ and other degrading and abusive words. Eventually these Macedonians found themselves in a dilemma; bow down to the CPG and EAM or fight back to protect themselves and their rights.

We Macedonians are characterized as having deep local patriotism. Our family and village were entities which we jealously guarded to preserve. This self-confidence and local loyalty are variables of our natural historic consequence. We carry a deep innate sense, namely loyalty in the spirit of Macedonia.

This Macedonian patriotism was put into action on March 5th, 1943 in Kostur Region when an Assembly of 48 members, representatives of the various villages, was convened and decided to form the “Macedonian Committee” for Kostur Region whose aim was to defend the 54 to 60 villages in that region. They were allowed to arm themselves because they needed protection from the Greeks. Everything else that has been said about them is a lie.

One morning Bai Kolio put on his usual freedom fighting robe made of a thick dark fabric adorned to look like an old oak trunk in autumn. The robe was specially made for him by his tailor Numo Shiklev. He put on his hat and strapped his decorated belt around his waist and then hung his silver handled sword on it. He looked proud and smelled of gunpowder as he looked into the distance, remembering decades of tears dropping on the steep slopes of the Kostur villages and drop by drop rolling down into the clear waters

of the river Bistritsa and continuing on their way to somewhere in Koreshtata.

Sitting on top of his white horse, the proud commander glanced over the city Kostur. A tear of happiness rolled down his cheek as if wanting to say to the world: ‘This is our time... my time. Scar after scar, I am still here..., now I am king of Kostur!’

But instead he smiled and said: ‘Oh, my Kostur, I have lived long enough to have walked over you and have left my footprints on you... Here we are! This is Macedonia. We Macedonians are the rightful owners of our own lands and every Greek needs to know that!’

He felt happy but also full of grief. Chills ran down his spine. He ordered his horse to move forward, in front of his freedom fighters standing all around him. Being the oldest among them and their leader, he addressed them by saying: ‘We are the sons of Kostur and we will defend it to the death. If any of my fighters wants to abandon it, I will be the one that will break their spine...’

Again the people of Kostur were worried that the winds of war would bring the worst in humanity and, forgetting their differences, they were prepared to defend their dignity. By now these patriotic Macedonians were tired of trying to prove to everyone that they were an ethnic group in the territory of Kostur, with a unique language and culture... and now with the first Macedonian guerrilla army.

In the words of Commander Paskal Dobrolitski: ‘We the Macedonian Commanders must lead this Macedonian army if we want to avoid damnation. This army will fight to the last man, to the last drop of blood. It will pursue the black gangs and military forces that have spilled our blood, sown fear and terror in our lands and will destroy them. The aim of these black gangs is to drive our people out, to banish the Macedonian people from their homeland so that they can take their wealth and possess their lands... We want to let the world know what we are fighting for...’

In the afternoon of the same day, Bai Kolio and his freedom fighters arrived in the spacious meadow located between the villages Bobishta and Olishta where they set up camp and rested. Other freedom fighting bands set up camp at the Sveti Vrach – Olitski monastery.

A great battle broke out when suddenly a large ELAS force made its appearance from several directions and began to shout: ‘Surrender! We will kill you all, you Fascists! You are fighting for Fascism!’

‘If we are Fascists then which side are you on?’ yelled Bai Kolio. Nusha Krienkova, a woman on the ELAS side, adjusted the red headscarf around her neck and sharply replied: ‘We are Communists! We are the glorious army of ELAS!’

I would not have known about Bai Kolio’s unusual story had it not been for Nusha Krienkova who, on September 13th at ten o’clock at night, with her ELAS unit captured him alive. She was told not to kill him with a bullet but to push him off the rocky cliff into the D’mbeni cavern, alive in front of the ELAS force and in the presence of the captured Macedonian freedom fighters. This method of execution was ordered by the Greeks and, according to them, was a befitting death for those who were heroic enough to want to be commanders and want to hold on to Kostur.

The Greeks were familiar with the Commander from the battles that they had fought against him. He had the largest military freedom fighting unit in Kostur, which for years had been under his command.

When Bai Kolio led the battles, his opponents noticed that his fighters showed admirable courage, the same kind of courage characteristic of the battle in defense of the village Shestevarsko, Kolio’s place of birth. Bai Kolio was always first to enter the battle, even under heavy fire, inspiring his fighters to do the same.

‘That’s how Bai Kolio was...’ his fighters used to say, ‘He was fearless. He stood there like a tree, immobile, as if growing from the ground!’

Bai Kolio always used to say: ‘Macedonia’s fate is our historical obligation; it is not to be left to strangers!’

He also used to say: ‘I want us to be like our Ilinden predecessors, like the Chakalarovs, the Kliashevs, the Pop – Traikovs... I want us all to be together, to survive so that we can see Macedonia free!’

At that moment the trumpet sounded and the ELAS fighters shouldered their rifles and left. They walked single file along the treacherous path through the deep gorge of Mount Mali-Madi. We walked along with them, ELAS fighters, villagers and Macedonian freedom fighters. They had their daggers on us and were escorting us to the Duloto (8), a deep dark pit located in D’mbeni. No one spoke for a long time. Then one of the freedom fighters whispered: ‘Maybe they are taking us to toss us into the D’mbeni pit...’ When we arrived they made us sit at its terrifying dark edge. The entrance to the vertical pit was dark looking like the gaping mouth of a hungry, giant crocodile... We climbed up to its edge in silence.

‘Even if I saw it with my own eyes, I would not have believed it!’ said Bai Kolio, but the dead silence that followed and hovered amongst us was an indication that our frightening end was near.

Bai Kolio walked in front of me without saying a word, he was a warrior, trained to attack and defend, and I and the column of captured freedom fighters followed in silence.

When we got closer to the pit, I heard laughing, sinister sounding laughs. I looked around and saw distortion, rage and contempt in the faces of the ELAS fighters all around us.

The horrifying ELAS games that were about to be played then were initiated by Commander Baskakis and his subordinate commanders of the most nationalist Greek units in the force, which included PAO (9) members the likes of Bouloukas, Papoulias, Papas, Kapaprukas, Sotiriadis, Kolaras, Periklis and Lefteris who were worse than the Nazis who tormented the Jews.

A tall man with a fleshy face, bushy eyebrows, eyes half-closed, hair uncut and braided ran to the front of the pit. His aggression was unusual, martyr-like. He was shaking all over with his chest pounding and his head feeling like it was in a vice. They say that the executioner looks like that when preparing to take his first victim. Before torturing his victim, they say the executioner has a smile on his face and slimy saliva drips out of his mouth.

Mito, with his small penetrating eyes and thick white hair, full of fear and trembling, was the next person to stand up. At the same time the top commander Baskakis, smelling of frankincense combined with the smell of sweat and blood, also stood up and jumped to his feet like a knight in shining armour with his dagger out. His ELAS fighters called him 'knight of the wolf pack'. He was cheered on by his group of bloodthirsty thugs as he stabbed his victims in the neck and watched them keel over and fall in front of his shiny boots.

The skilled killers toyed with their victims by slicing them a few times with their sharp knives before stabbing them hard in the heart, stomach, or back. They learned this skill from knight Baskakis and that's how they got the nickname 'wolf pack'.

From where we the prisoners sat, around the mouth of the pit, all we could hear was Baskakis's voice, the stabbing sounds of the wolf pack stabbing its victims and the loud screams that traveled way beyond the far side of Kostur.

Keeping us alive to this point was like a pre-ritual ceremony before a sacrifice, and exactly after that a knife was thrust into the heart of every convicted Macedonian freedom fighter.

His two-edged dagger glistened in Baskakis's hand as he, one by one, offered his victims to the dark pit.

First he plunged his dagger into the Macedonian freedom fighter's neck and when the fighter fell to his knees he tossed his dying body into the pit. He did this several times. Now happy and smiling, Baskakis approached Commander Bai Kolio. He aimed his dagger at

him and looked at him with a sick look on his face, as if wanting to play with him first.

I thought to myself, if he asked me so say something about the fighting spirit of the Macedonian freedom fighters, what would I say? I decided that I had plenty to say about that, but if he asked me about the ELAS fighters I would tell him how many I had shot at, I would even tell him what my grandfather had done to the Andartes during the Ilinden (1903) days when they came to Kostur. I would tell him exactly what my grandfather said: ‘What the f**k are you doing here robbing and killing Macedonians?’

‘This is more horrifying than the gladiatorial games,’ I whisper into Pando Koreshtanski’s ear who, at the time, was holding my hand tight so that I would not scream. We all watched intently as Baskakis pointed his bloody dagger at Commander Bai Kolio’s neck and said:

‘We the ELAS fighters have a military code by which we do not kill commanders in this way. It would be my honour to address Commander Bai Kolio and ask him to show great courage by voluntarily jumping into this black hole and if he does we will forgive everything...

Everyone went silent.

Bai Kolio stood up and walked over to the edge of the pit. From there he could hear the wailing voices of his dying fighters from deep down in the black hole.

Staring down the pit’s shaft, the wise commander said to himself: ‘Each life has its own value but the most valuable life is the one which is given in defense of our homeland Macedonia...’

The fearless commander, after assuming his position, raised his hand and addressed Baskakis with the words:

‘Before I die, here before everyone, I want to kiss the hand of his highness Mr. Baskakis, Commander of the ELAS forces, and

congratulate him on his victory, and then, by my free will, before everyone's eyes, I will jump and take my own life...'

Immediately Baskakis jumped to his feet and went to Commander Bai Kolio to receive his congratulations. All the fighters who were sitting down stood up and applauded by shouting: 'Long live ELAS, long live Commander Baskakis, long live the ELAS fighters.' I heard one fighter say: 'Finally the rebel commander has enough courage to repent and apologize to us...'

A moment later Baskakis, looking dignified, took his place beside Bai Kolio so that he could kiss his hand. The old Commander, with lightning speed, grabbed Baskakis and took him down the shaft of the dark pit with him. Baskakis's loud cry in horror: 'Dear mother' deafened us all. Mixed with Baskakis's crying we also heard Commander Bai Kolio's baritone voice yelling: 'For Macedonia!'

All of us... we could not believe what we had seen. I could not contain my joy and excitement... I was shaking like a leaf in the wind...' concluded Krapov, who suddenly stopped talking and went into deep thought as if wanting to re-visit the moment.

I too had to take a moment to process what Krapov had just told me.

Then, suddenly without warning, Krapov resumed telling his story. He said: "We all stood there petrified, like our blood had suddenly frozen in our veins... from fear and horror. Feeling sad, Filip Paskalevski looked away and bowed his head down. He shed a few tears for the Commander but also felt satisfaction by the stunt he had pulled. He wanted to say: 'We need to follow the Commander's lead because, even before his death, he had told us how to die for Macedonia...'

I looked at Filip with a nostalgic look. We smiled at each other and that smile said a lot...

Then I felt horrible! I had just witnessed a great human being die. Suddenly I felt as if the entire country... all of Macedonia was drenched in blood... caused by inhumanity. My grandfather used to

say: ‘It would be great to die like a man...’ And that’s how Bai Kolio died...

Bai Kolio used to say: ‘Think before you commit to something because if you don’t believe in it, it is treason!’

After Bai Kolio jumped and took Baskakis with him, in revenge Baskakis’s henchmen took young Vasil (Tsile) Shilegov, Kolio’s adjutant (warrant officer) to the mouth of the pit. Vasil was a young man and had no hatred in his heart. He was also an only child. They pushed him down the shaft and the only thing we heard from him was: ‘For mother Macedonia!’

God! My God, we all kept staring at the black hole. I was afraid. Fear overcame me... I thought my heart was going to jump out of my chest. I said to Pando Glavinov: ‘It looks like we all will end up in there.’ He looked at me with a sad look and then looked at Filip.

That evening the ELAS fighters were wild and confused and told the story about the D’mbeni pit over and over again.

And that is how Bai Kolio died. And that is how Tsile Schilegov died,” concluded Krapov, fading out.

Then suddenly he said: “I only knew him for a short time but I will never forget him...” Then, after a short pause, Krapov said: “My grandfather used to say: ‘You can understand the character of a person when they become your boss... your superior officer. I had that honour when I served in his unit, and I was happy to have had the privilege to serve under the command of a man who fought for Macedonia.”

Then Krapov said to me: “Fate was cruel to many Macedonian revolutionaries... especially to Bai Kolio... but then he died a hero. He was a mature and wise man, in full control of his faculties. He was also like that with his leadership abilities.

Bai Kolio used to say: ‘The Greeks, as invaders and occupiers, talked a lot about us, especially about the Macedonian freedom fighting rebels, saying that we were illiterate. Yes, but still our

ignorance was closer to the truth than the prejudices of the Macedonian Grkomani (Grekophils) and now the modern ELAS communists’.

Our people who declared themselves communists, together with the Greeks, wanted to destroy the Macedonian freedom fighters, unfortunately, as is the case with us Macedonians, the truth ruined their ideals.”

Krsto Krapov then looked me in the eyes and said: “I want to tell you something about obedience and about the resistance. This is why Bai Kolio was right. But I want you to understand, a fact which you and I witnessed and experienced, that none of these Macedonian communists who were part of ELAS then remained with our people. These communists fled to Tito, where they were manipulated the most. It is interesting to know that those Macedonians who were in ELAS in 1944, together with the Greek communists Himaros and Arionos, destroyed the Macedonian freedom fighters, but during the Greek Civil War the same people led the Macedonians, but now with the help of organizations created by Tito, again with our people.

These ideological activists of ours blindly followed the authority of their leaders who pushed them to swell up their forces with Macedonians so that they could bleed them for someone else’s interests. We, the ordinary people, were abused to no end, and not only became victims but in the end, the biggest losers in this tragic war. We were left with nothing. Now we think about it every day and live with the hope that someday my son will hug me, the same son that Queen Frederica took away from me.

One thing is clear. We never lost our obedience. They bled us to death and we still remained loyal to them. We allowed precisely the same commanders who destroyed our Macedonian freedom fighters in Kostur to lead us again during the Greek Civil War. No wonder we lost everything... Some things forever...

In fact this is what happened to us Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia: ‘For as long as we, the Macedonian freedom fighters, fought to free and preserve the Macedonian home, property and

family and remain in our fatherland, the Macedonians in ELAS, the internationalists, together with their Greek partners, fought hard to liquidate us as soon as possible.’

Exactly during that period of time, we as a people demonstrated our Macedonian slave mentality.

We, the freedom fighters, did not accept our slavery as our fate and did not kneel before any of the occupiers; we wanted to preserve our existence; our own existence. And what happened to us Macedonians? If anyone raised their head before the Greeks and wanted to defend themselves, say from PAO or from ELAS, they were destroyed. And in the end they destroyed us all anyway!

It was a time when the ideology practiced in the Balkans ruled the world.

And after they did that, the Macedonian communists of ELAS left their homeland and, in their history about all this, they portrayed their deeds as positive and labeled us, the true Macedonian freedom fighters, fascists...

All this reminds me of the verses our poet Petre M. Andreevski wrote: ‘They were brothers and first cousins, beautiful sisters, aunts and uncles, who struggled for the same homeland, which they then divided when relations cooled. Then when they had a fight they decided to wear foreign hats. And then one day when they went looking for those hats, they found they had none’ ... concluded Krapov, becoming silent.

By now I had learned to recognize the signs of when Krapov was upset but this time he was visibly trembling. Thinking of our past upset him a lot... He took a deep breath of fresh air and continued with his story.

He said: “We Macedonians don’t know how to protect our historic and cultural valuables from our place of origin...

Let me be the first to openly say that we Macedonians are a strange sort. Consciously or unconsciously, all this time in this Balkan fog,

we have ignored our own history. For generations we have kept silent about the crimes committed against our people. For generations we endured genocides in silence. We have basically allowed the Greeks to make Macedonia theirs; a Macedonia without Macedonians and have said and done nothing to stop them!

Only we, the Macedonian freedom fighters, remained loyal to our cause and because of that, those of us who survived were sent to the dry Greek island prisons. There we lost our moral compass and values but still refused to join ELAS (the collectivist fictional matrix, sold to us by the cleverness of Tempo and Siantos). Then, at the time when ideology ruled, Tempo told us that he and the top CPG leadership had agreed to have Macedonian units in ELAS; a Macedonian army.

With this kind of immature thinking, we insulted everyone in our history including our Ilinden revolutionaries. We even offended our history. All the lies we lived through and experienced were channeled through this ideology which eventually led to the start of the Greek Civil War (1945 - 1949). What the CPY and CPG could not achieve with pure lies they achieved with more inventive measures... ideological deception. We must recognize what was done to us and hold onto the spirit of Ilinden ... What happened to us Macedonians during the Greek Civil War was pure fraud... the lie of the century... And this is how it must be portrayed in our history... as betrayal...

This... this is what has happened to us... Macedonian ELAS Communists versus Macedonian freedom fighters... another national embarrassment, but don't believe it will be the last. The Greeks will not rest and will always look for devious methods to eradicate us, to eradicate our name, to expel and exile us from our ancestral homes, and by doing so they will make their possession of Macedonia easier and forever.

We remained and still remain silent for what? For the slaughtering, the persecution and the annihilation of the Macedonian family?! For the destruction of the Macedonian nation?! For being uprooted from our ancestral homes? Why are we still silent?!

OH, MY FRIEND, ALL THESE MEMORIES GIVE ME PAIN!”
concluded old man Krsto Krapov.

Chapter six - One of the sickest stories

For the sake of love, Queen Frederica separated the Macedonian children from their mothers and sent them to hell. For the mothers the separation was worse than death!

About this, Krsto Krapov said: “My memories will haunt me forever.”

I dedicate this chapter to all those who endured the sickest, most savage and inhuman conditions and genocidal acts during the child collection programs. To the mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers who lost their opportunity to see their children and grandchildren grow up, to the brothers and sisters who did not grow up together and especially those who could not return to their native place, not even to die there.

Krapov said: “...‘Nothing hurts more than the tears of a child... dear Krsto, there are no words to describe the pain a mother feels. When I heard him crying... my Doncho, I don’t think Queen Frederica, as a mother, understood how that felt...’ all broken up and in tears said Kiritsa, or Latsa as she was called at home in Kostur.”

Such were Krapov’s memories each time he visited the grave of his beloved. His memories of her weighed on his soul and he cried with each visit while holding a lit candle.

Krapov looked at me and said: “What will history say about this? What will history say about us Macedonians? Will history say anything at all? They did all this for another reason, even though they said it was done to save the children.

They will never mention anything! Half a century has passed and nothing has been said; not about the many thousands of victims whose bones were left on the battle fields. These people were fathers and brothers... yet nothing has been said about them... nothing has been recorded in our history...

My good friend, you don't know what hope is until you have lost it. Now, years later, when I come to the grave of my Kiratsa (Latsa) I too am eager to leave this unfair world..."

I accompanied Krapov all through the cemetery. I was embarrassed because, of all those present, I was the only one who did not light a candle. I don't know why I am like that. Perhaps I was brought up that way. I spent a long part of my life dealing with communist ideals. Perhaps I was an atheist after all. I would not cross myself, I would not light a candle but I do respect our traditions and love the ways of my ancestors. I remember when we were burying my grandmother in Tashkent we followed Communist Party protocol. It was also the same for all of our fighters; a short revolutionary speech.

Krapov kept looking at me. I figured he wanted to say something. Perhaps he wanted to tell me that I was "ignorant" and that I had been misled, even brainwashed, but instead he continued to stare at me... torturing me... finally he said: "Have you changed?"

Have I changed? How have I changed? I was left speechless... I did not understand the question and thus I did not know what to say. I did not answer him.

Krapov then said: "My day on Saturday begins unusually early. Just before seven o'clock in the morning I go and lay flowers on the graves of my closest. I have made it my habit to linger near the grave of my beloved late Kiratsa who died before her time. I get the feeling that there is an invisible force connecting me to her just like when we were young. She was one of the most beautiful, tender and sensitive young women in Kostur. We were faithful to each other and very happy, especially after our son Doncho was born. We named him after my father. Unfortunately, as his father, I never got the opportunity to see him grow up. I was sent to prison... to the dry Greek islands... that was my fate... The truth can be so cruel..."

After taking a moment to recompose himself, Krapov continued: "In prison I tried to convince myself that everything was going to be okay once I returned home. I told myself that I would turn a new

page and my family would come together again... but... I was lying to myself.

Then I left the island and returned to my home and to my people in Kostur... And since then all I have done is walk from my home to the cemetery and back. On the island I carried stones, here I carry roses and other flowers and light candles... winter and summer...

Roses were my beloved Kiratsa's favourite flowers... It is painful to look at your own fate..." concluded Krapov.

Yes, I thought to myself. What cruel game fate can play. Poor Krapov, he is like a wounded animal with no purpose to live and living in constant pain. No one understands his pain. And based on the mocking of people who notice his physical disabilities, no one respects him. No one knows his mental anguish, let alone what he has done for his people. No one even cares what this gifted fighter had done for Macedonia and for Kostur during his days as a Macedonian freedom fighter and rebel.

"Life can become very difficult for a man who has been tainted by the Greek government!" he said. His entire life he had to endure listening to people mocking him... their quiet laughs... their whispers...

He loves to read. He reads all kinds of books, especially those on Macedonian history and about Kostur and Macedonia.

Sometimes he wonders how much of the memories of the Macedonian people's sacrifices have already been lost over time? How much has been lost from Ilinden to this day? How long are we going to remember those things? Will they matter when we forget them or will they become the inalienable property of those who, unlike us, are still remembering and attaching their own undeserved importance to them.

"Our Greek occupiers, more recently, with total disregard for us have bulldozed our cemeteries, dug up the bones of our ancestors and discarded them into the wild. After this, do you think there is any sense of hope that there will be a future for us here? When these

things were happening do you think any of the internationalists, the likes of Markos and his DAG cohorts thought of us; to return those bones to us or to collect the bones of our people scattered throughout the whole of Europe, all the way to Tashkent?" asked Krapov.

Will there be anyone who will be willing to tell the truth about why we abandoned Macedonia, why Macedonia was stripped of its Macedonians and why we were evicted and sent away to scatter all over the world?!

Look at this poor man and you wonder why his eyes are filled with tears? The old people used to say: "We cry from our unpleasant bitterness!"

"I can no longer remain silent on this matter. I want everyone to know that I can no longer carry this secret with me for the rest of my life. I believe every human being wants his or her bones to rest in their homeland, beside those of their ancestors," said Krapov.

It was April 8, 1988. Krapov remembered the date well. It was the day that he was released from the Island prison; after serving a 40 year sentence.

"I was on my way home," he said. "It was a beautiful clear morning when I left and arrived in Kostur in time to witness the sunset. Unfortunately the sky was covered in dark clouds and the wind was carrying the smell of rain. The first thing I heard were the church bells calling for evening prayer. I was in an unusually good mood that day because it was my beloved Kiratsa's birthday. She was sixty-two years old. She was a beautiful woman and I was blessed to have married her but cursed to not have enjoyed a life with her..."

Then, suddenly I thought I heard Kiratsa whispering my name. I will never know for sure if I truly heard those two words or if I just wanted to hear them and my own mind fabricated them. All I remember was raising my head up and looking at Kiratsa's lips as she was trying to open her eyes. Suddenly fear gripped my entire

body as I entered the yard and heard a sudden scream. It came from the ground floor of the house. It was a woman screaming. What could it be?

I felt cold all over. I was confused and worried as I ran toward the entrance of the house. My eyes were blinded with what seemed like whirlpools and I could not see where I was going. I had waited for this moment for years, counting the days before returning home and my aim was to arrive there exactly on the day of my wife's sixty-second birthday.

It started to rain hard and dusk descended very fast. Suddenly it was night. It came as sudden as a blunt axe on the neck of a victim. Darkness soon became thick and opaque. A weak light filtered out from the window, emanating from some kind of petroleum fueled lantern.

My excitement was overpowering as I rushed madly to meet the woman who to me seemed like Kiratsa with her sweet and gentle smile, bursting with happiness, looking at me with her beautiful meek eyes, just like she had looked in her youthful days when we first met.

When I came closer I raised my eyes and I saw Kiratsa with her mild and restless eyes looking at me from the window on the lower floor. I don't know if she recognized me. I smiled at her when I entered the room; apparently she was not aware of my return... and did not remember what we had discussed at our final meeting.

For a moment we stood aghast, looking at each other.

'It was horrible! Like horror! I thought I would never see you again!' Kiratsa said to me angrily. 'I invested my entire life in you and you don't seem to be grateful,' she added.

I did not know what to say. Time was standing still as we looked at each other in silence with our eyes full of tears.

I hugged her and said: 'May God be my witness that is not true. I always longed for you!'

Kiratsa was tired of talking about the injustices perpetrated by the powerful. They were what they were, period.

Time had slowly passed and eroded her beauty with its permanent traces.

She was wearing a green velvet dress and her smooth and plentiful hair was twisted into a bun. The best thing about her was her teary eyes when they were no longer tearing. When I looked at her face carefully I became anxious. It was full of wrinkles, looking like interlocking grooves. I looked at her again and thought: ‘These lines are the result of the secret pain in her life, a life spent waiting in sleeplessness, in fear...’ I wish I could take them and her pain away... All the ideals in the world were not worth the tears she shed for our child when he was taken away. They ruined all my hopes. I can no longer love anyone. I don’t want a life without my child. I don’t hate the people, I just feel better when they are not around me.

She stood beside the wooden chest in which she had carefully folded Doncho’s, my young son, clothes to safeguard them for his return. She kept all his stuff; shirts, shoes, sweaters, hats and socks. I noticed that she had also kept my hat from when I was a rebel. She loved all this stuff and was hoping that one day they would bring back our children who, by order of Queen Frederica, were sent to special camps here inside Greece...

I noticed that she had a couple of long wrinkles running down her cheeks. She watched me looking at her and said nothing. I noticed that there was an unspoken plea in her eyes, as if wanting to tell me something, perhaps something sad, but she said nothing. There was only silence. The pain she felt and the darkness that surrounded us had killed her desire to speak.

I remember our time well when we were young and in love, we were happy. Now Kiratsa looks sad and full of explosive feelings. I thought to myself: ‘Her soul has endured much torment and dark times!’

I hugged her again and said: ‘Kiratsa my love, I have returned to our nest!?’

She said nothing, but I still continued to hug and squeeze her while looking at the flowery dress that she was wearing.

I thought to myself: ‘She must have forgotten me? This is a disaster...’ I couldn’t help myself but think of the worst: ‘Surely Kiratsa must have lost her memory.’

She had no make up on her face but still she was beautiful. I hugged her again, this time harder, squeezing her in my arms, all the while thinking how can she have possibly lost her memory and how can there be a future with no past. Will I ever hear her beautiful voice sing again like she did in the old days when we were working in the fields? The thing that hurt me the most about this is, knowing that it is the woman that plans and makes the nest...

‘What is it?’ I whispered to her and, as she looked at me with a puzzled look on her face, I said: ‘I am Krsto. I am back. Why are you looking at me like that?’

She then blindly reached for my hand and I, excitedly, firmly grabbed hers. It felt like we were returning to the past.

Kiratsa sighed deeply and tried to smile. She lowered my hands into the trunk with Doncho’s folded clothing and nodded with her head trying to tell me something. I bowed down and touched the temple of her head. She shivered.

In the dark of night I asked her: ‘What is it? Don’t you remember me?’ Then I felt my own body shiver and my hands shake.

She slowly and gently shook her head. I then stroked her hair and said: ‘Kiratsa my love, what is it?’

I repeated the same question many times and after some time her eyes filled with tears and she said: ‘Come here sit down beside me.’

‘Are you crying?’ I asked her. ‘Yes I am!’ she replied and moved slightly over so that she could see me more clearly, then said: ‘The truth is I did not believe that one day I would see you...’

Now full of courage and confidence in herself she said: ‘I will tell you all about our only son... It is eating away at me to have given birth to a child and to then have that child taken away from me. This is the most terrible thing that could happen to a mother... her soul is all torn up inside...’

For years after he was gone I waited for news from my little son Doncho, and nothing. Day by day ever since then my heart drips poison and I constantly curse those who took him, I curse the hidden hand of Queen Frederica for doing this to me and to all the mothers who lost their children in this way.

I don’t know if you know how far Queen Frederica’s boundaries of power can reach!?’

I could see the pain in her face and grief in her eyes as she recounted her story. Listening to her talk about our lost child and looking at her expressions made me very sad and sick to my stomach; it was killing me. There was no happiness in Kiratsa’s life and I felt responsible for that. I looked her straight in the eyes and noticed that she was crying again. She looked back at me and gave me a great big hug. I could see guilt in her face. She must have blamed herself for what happened. I hugged her right back and assured her that I loved her. I said to her: ‘I love you. I have always loved you. I am very happy to be here with you. Believe me, we will find our son!’

‘You are serious...?’ she replied and suddenly became a different person, a happy and cheerful person. Her eyes brightened up and she put on a great big smile. She was delighted at the prospect of finding our son.

‘I love you too!’ she whispered with eyes full of tears as she turned towards me. Now she felt confident and did not fear or want to escape the past or the burden of secrets concealed in her bosom.

Oh, what weight! What a great big weight, enough to crush a stone, had been lifted from her chest! Now she was ready to tell me everything from her life, a sad life that she lived alone here in our home.

‘For years,’ she said, ‘there has been no place of joy or of silence in our home. It was a place of sorrow, tears and loud crying. There were no children to run about, no children’s voices, no children’s laughter and no joy. They took our children and with them they took our happiness. They left all the mothers in pain and wounded with deep open wounds... wounds in our hearts and in our souls, wounds that don’t heal, wounds that constantly bleed and burn. There was nothing that could be done to ease our pain because the wounds were deep inside in our hearts and in our souls. We lived in fear and constant pain from the time we woke up. The fear and pain was there every day, waiting to greet us...’

Unfortunately her sudden joy was fleeting because now she felt sad, overwhelmed and choked up by the build up of sad feelings that she carried in her heart. I grabbed her hand and gently asked her to take her time and slowly tell me everything so that I could understand the feelings of inhumanity felt by these poor mothers who were deprived of their children. She agreed. Her voice was full of sympathy as she began to speak again, unfortunately with difficulty as her throat kept choking with each spoken word and her eyes filling with tears. It seemed like the floodgates were about to be opened and everything trapped in her heart and soul was about to come out. There had been a lot of suffering and it needed to come out.

Kiratsa remembered everything. She squeezed my hand and said: ‘Krsto, I wrote you about our son... they took him away from me by force. Not only our son, they took all the children from their mothers by order from Queen Frederica’.

She stopped talking and slowly walked over to the icon of the Virgin Mary. She stood up in front of it and began to curse: “Queen, as a mother may you burn in pain like I do so that you can understand what you have done to me! So that you may never feel joy for the hell you put us through! You took my child, may God strike you

dead! You took my beloved child and by doing so you ripped open my heart and soul! The souls of all the mothers! He was my only child... you took my only child and now, after so many years, I don't know where he is?'

She then turned to me and said: 'This is how I spent the last forty years of my life... moaning in pain...'

She continued with her cursing, hoping to get some relief. Some time later she stopped, turned to me and resumed her story.

'Krsto,' she said, 'many trucks and guards came that January morning. There were two large dogs in front of each truck. Only the soldiers and police were allowed access. They grabbed my child and ordered me to stay back. I lacked the strength to do anything. He was our son, mine and yours... they took him from me by force... they tore him from my chest. He was the love and joy of my life.

He kept calling me: 'Oh mother, dear mother, please don't give me away!... I love you mother! I want to wait for father with you! Please don't give me away...' I love you a lot! Please write to father and the two of you come and get me! These are bad people and they will kill me... Please mother don't let them take me...'

He continued to cry and yell: 'Mother! Mother! Mother!...' but what could I do? So I prayed and prayed and prayed for the safety of my only child. They would not tell us where they were taking the children and if they were going to keep them alive or not. It was a nightmare for all the mothers, we felt unbelievable pain... which would not subside... not even after all these years...

The roar of the truck engines and the barking of the dogs masked the cries of the mothers calling to their children while looking up, to a sky filled with smoke and dust, for relief.

With a step of uncertainty and with a distorted face, every mother pushed her way closer to the trucks to say just a few more words to their loved ones.'

At that point Kiratsa stopped talking and began to cry loudly. I thought to myself: ‘Nothing can comfort the pain of a mother. What kind of God, who listens to these cries and cursing of Queen Frederica every day, would allow this torment to go on and would do nothing to remedy the problem?’

Kiratsa regained her composure and resumed telling her story. She said: ‘Besides, no one could get near the trucks without being torn apart by those dogs. It was chaos. There was a line of heavily armed guards pushing the mothers back, every time one got near them.

Crying their eyes out, the mothers directed their curses at the individuals directly responsible and at the Queen Frederica, yelling: ‘Shame on you! Shame on the Queen! Shame on the state!...’

Kiratsa experienced her worst moment in that episode when the guards ordered her to stay back and the horrible dogs, trained to hate, lunged at her, pulling their leashes to the limit, trying to tear her apart. The sight of their vicious canine teeth, the eyes filled with hatred and fury and the loud barking made her skin crawl.

‘The soldiers,’ she said, ‘did not hesitate to use extreme force and beat us with everything they had. One commander waving his rifle hit me on the head with its butt. I was practically knocked unconscious. I was blinded by the blow and staggered around. I then saw a white-haired old man holding a stick and leaning on a wall some distance from the crowd. He too had been beaten and was weeping.’

Kiratsa wept as she told her story and every once in a while yelled out: ‘Please God! Please save our children...’

‘The military trucks, covered with a thick canvas,’ she said, ‘then began to roll on their way south following the road that led to the bare and dry Greek islands. This was terrible! I was struck with fear and horror and I could not help but think of the worst. It was a nightmare for all the mothers. We all ran after the trucks as fast as we could. It wasn’t too long after that we ran into a unit of gendarmes with dogs trained to kill. They stopped us from following

the trucks and beat us back with their rifle butts. All we could do was turn back and swear at them and curse them.’

Then, suddenly, Kiratsa’s eyes glistened strangely as she began to tell me that: ‘Everyone was crying; the old people, the women, the children... Everyone cried... All of Kostur was crying. It was terrible... The trucks left and the children could no longer see the lake... This was farewell for them from their beloved Kostur, their birthplace! The question in every child’s mind must have been: ‘Will I ever return to the place where I was born?’

Well, this is what the Queen Frederica did to us! A mother without feelings... This is how it was my dear Krsto... They treated us like dogs and then sent us home to our pain and loneliness...

‘They pulled him from my arms by force as we both kept crying,’ she said. ‘I can still remember the day vividly. The thought breaks me up, it torments me and blows my mind... I think of his childhood, of us being in love, of our hopes... but nothing helps. I am constantly alienated and feel like I am living in an unfair world... inside a storm... I want our son to return to us, to our home. Sometimes I want to go on living the life we lived before all this happened but I can’t.

What evil have these Greeks brought upon us? Every day they find ways to destroy the Macedonian family and the Macedonian home. Where did these Greeks come from? They must have come from a spiritually crippled civilization because everything they do to us natives, in their reality they perceive as something quite normal... But in our reality it is genocide... They want to get rid of us... force us out of our native homes and lands... force us out of our native Kostur.

There is an old saying: ‘When the Greeks came God left Macedonia...’

She then looked at me and said: ‘I have no more tears to shed. Sometimes I want to go on with life but, from where I stand and since they took my child, I no longer have the strength. They

grabbed him like he was a dog, but not just mine many of our children...’

When we were lying in bed I told her everything that they did to me on the island and that they ruined my ability to reproduce by destroying my manhood. I said to her: ‘I am very sorry. I don’t want to bring you more pain but I need you to know the truth... They destroyed my manhood. I also knew that you would wait for me.’

It was not something that she took lightly. My words weighed heavy in her heart. I could tell by the beads of sweat that formed on her forehead and by her tear filled eyes looking at me. She laid her head on my shoulder, closed her eyes, took a deep breath and said: ‘So, they destroyed our family line!’

Kiratsa got out of bed, walked around the room and then stood by the window staring into the dark. Our lives and the lives of many people from Kostur had been lost somewhere in that thick darkness. She crossed herself and said: ‘Dear Lord, give me strength to endure what I cannot change... How can I accept this? How can I accept these beastly acts purposely perpetrated by our occupiers to destroy us... God, only you know... And we, all we do is keep silent and flee! How can we not know that the foundations of Kostur were laid by our great ancestor King Samoil?’

These people who grabbed my child and took him away from me were neither by appearance nor behaviour, ordinary people, they were blood thirsty monsters!

Yes! They are people from a spiritually crippled civilization. These people greedily killed our Ilinden predecessors and now our children... For years they have committed genocide against us.

They changed our names because our ancestors believed that a man’s name was essential to his identity, and his identity made the man who he is!

They changed our ethnic composition by bringing strangers to Macedonia, Turkish Christian colonists and settlers from Asia Minor.

They prohibited us from speaking our Macedonian language, the mother tongue of our people... which is a basic human right...

They erased our history which we carried with us from generation to generation passed on from our grandfathers, which has been part of our consciousness, our spiritual sustenance...

They took over our holy churches and persecuted our priests. Those who protested were slain... beheaded... and no one knows where they tossed their bodies.

They destroyed our monuments and cemeteries.

I am aware that we Macedonians don't expect these invaders to love us but we do expect them to use a little common sense in the way they treat us, especially from their Queen. From the common man right up to the Queen, all these thirty or more years, no common sense was used. That is because their basic plan has always been to destroy us and to erase everything about us from history. Their main goal was to erase everything Macedonian including the Macedonian identity and in their books to call us the nameless dead.'

Kiratsa had survived a terrible ordeal. She experienced strong dark feelings, so strong that she believed they were going to kill her before she saw our son Doncho again.

Her years of separation from our little son, her longing for him, her sadness and dark thoughts, all piled up in her soul. She lived feeling guilty because she believed that she had given up our son easily and that thought upset her very much.

She felt useless. She did not have anything else left to do but pray for our son to be alive.

One day she knelt down and put her head on his little bed and remembered how she had held him in her arms. When he was about five years old he told his mother: ‘Mommy, I will be the man of the house until daddy comes back. I will protect you from the bad people... Don’t cry, don’t worry, one day daddy will come back.’ And as my grandmother used to say: ‘He is a brave little freedom fighter heroically defending Kostur...’

She looked disturbed, her lips were trembling. She turned away from me so that I would not look at her when she cried... Seeing her this way upset me very much...

She went back to the wooden chest and refolded Doncho’s tiny clothes. Who knows whether he is alive or not... we lived with the hope that he was and listened to the rumours of where they may have taken him. There was a circulating rumour that the children were taken to some island where they were being taught skills and that one day they would be returning.

Most of the time, day and night, Kiratsa spent her time in front of the icon cursing Queen Frederica. She begged God to punish her, as a mother, as a woman, and send her to hell. ‘How can she be a Queen,’ she used to yell out, ‘and do this to innocent children and to the mothers who bore them... to snatch them from their homes and ruin their family line? She does not resemble a queen! Oh God, destroy her family line like she has destroyed mine... let her feel how I feel...’

Every day it was the same thing... silence followed by a lot of lamenting. Sometimes our silence was our lamenting.

There was always the look of fear and concern on her face. One day she quickly sat, drooped on a chair. I looked at her. She looked as white as a ghost. She looked back at me but with a very strange look, like a person who had just survived a severe shock. She kept shaking her head while staring at me.

As time went on in our loneliness, she cried less and less and kept silent more and more. She had less and less of a desire to continue living.

I thought to myself: ‘Is this the end? Is the end near, knocking on the door, knocking on my head? In Kostur there are unfaithful but also faithful, there are suspicions and slaughter, there are murders and burnings and there is the collapse of the family. Our failures have divided us, our murders have disconcerted us. Is this the end? Is that it?’

I remembered Kostur differently. I remembered Kostur to be a place where the young pledged their love to each other... where people were happy to be together. And now?!

Sometimes life makes you want to forget who you are?

Kiratsa was not the only one living with such pain. Thousands of Macedonian mothers cried for their loved ones and cursed, swore, screamed and shouted, wondering how Queen Frederica, a trusted woman, who after World War II the people viewed like a second Virgin Mary, could reach so low as to kidnap innocent children, snatch them from the arms of their crying mothers, like some kind of she wolf? All the mothers lit candles and prayed to the Virgin Mary to punish the Queen and to do to her as she had done to them. The Mothers of the taken children even signed a petition and sent it to all the queens of the world to let them know the kind of evil that had been done to them. All Christian women also asked their churches to condemn this act.

Kiratsa used to write to me in prison and tell me many things about our son. Then one day she wrote and said that they had taken him. At this point I did not want to live and contemplated suicide. Then I found out that this whole hellish Greek strategy was invented by Queen Frederica. It was a planned genocide perpetrated against the Macedonian people to destroy the Macedonian home and the Macedonian family. This genocidal act was most probably designed to make life a living hell for the thousands of Macedonian mothers who lost their children. And in reality it didn’t take long for this plan to come to fruition. Mothers were indeed thrown into oblivion and their pain and suffering eventually tore up their families. The

mothers, for years, continued to live lives filled with anger and eternal longing for their children.

This kind of genocidal behaviour, having children taken away from their mothers, was uncommon in the history of mankind. But think about it. If you are to destroy the cubs of a wolf, a bear, a fox in the wild... then you destroy the line of that animal. Well, this is what Queen Frederica has done to us!

Look how many years have already passed and still both Kiratsa and I live miserable lives, waiting for our son to return and still there is no trace of him. Our souls are bleeding and have blackened with sorrow... and all we can do is pray...

After my return from the island in hell we were unable to have more children, not only because we were too old... but because it was my fault... I lost my manhood... It was my punishment from my tormentor... my executioner... he might as well have killed me then and there. He was a blood-thirsty monster for doing this inhuman thing to me... Also our time to reproduce had passed...

They say a man truly dies when the last memory of him dies. My memories of my Kiratsa will never fade.

Many years had passed since Kiratsa and I had seen each other. By the time I returned home she was not only an old woman but was unable to show any feelings or even talk to me. A lifetime of torment and pain made things difficult for her, especially talking about things that weighed heavily on her... and on me. She continuously used to say: 'They grabbed my baby! I was alone and powerless! They took something very precious from me, the very thing that made me think of you... of our future... Nothing hurts more than the tears of a child... what else can I tell you dear Krsto? When I heard him crying... my Doncho... why can't Queen Frederica, as a mother, understand that?'

Her eyes were always filled with tears. She would hug me and whisper: ‘I want my son back, my only son. God, please God, return him to me!’

Every day she repeated this. She would close her eyes, bow her head down and then open her arms and cry out: ‘How can we live without Doncho?’ After she hugged me she would pull away and shake her head. I felt sorry for her every time and would say to her: ‘I love you... I will always love you... For a fleeting moment there would be a look in her eyes, a familiar look I recognized from the past, but that look would quickly be replaced with a look filled with fear. She was always afraid that Doncho had been taken away to be killed...

One day, in the old house, she was quiet, too quiet. The silence was deafening. It was scary...” concluded Krapov, lowering his head and going deep into thought.

I could not help but feel sorry for him... and at the same time admire him... Krsto Krapov was like an old tree with deep roots in this country and in Kostur Region. He loved his country and the city Kostur immensely because it was the soil that sustained his family and people for many generations. Krsto did not care much for the invaders, past or present. It was sad to hear that he watched his wife Kiratsa suffer and wither away... It was heart-breaking. The poor woman cried herself unconscious every time she looked at a photograph of their son. Every moment of every day she spent thinking of him, imagining the worst and having fits of anger, pain and anguish... feeling bitter, helpless and unable to fulfill her only wish... his safe return home... She did not know where he was and how he was doing, so every thought of him, every memory of him brought tears to her eyes and pain and bitterness to her heart and soul...

Look at the poor man. He looks so sad it seems like he has forgotten what he wanted to tell me. As I watched him struggle with his demons, I could not help myself but think of my own fate. I noticed many stunning similarities in the way we both have suffered.

Krapov’s face had many more wrinkles than my own, his hair was completely white, his teeth were broken and cracked and his eyes

looked faded and very tired. But in spite of all these differences, our similarities in our mental anguish were nevertheless very similar. We both have experience enough torment and injustice to last us many lifetimes. Our pain is the same pain that our fathers and grandfathers have experienced; whose bones now lie in heaps in unmarked graves or are scattered all over the mountains being bleached by the sun. This is where our common pain lies...

After a short silence, Krapov recovered from his thoughts and, as if swallowing something, his voice broke up when he tried to speak.

He composed himself, looked at me and said: "Oh, my dear friend! I want to say a few things about our genocide... About all those Greeks, be they communists, fascists, democrats or whatever, who say we do not exist, about all those who let the war happen, be they the English, the Americans, the Yugoslavs or whoever. I want to talk about all those from our side who played the communist card and rode rabid horses to the end, thinking that they were solving the 'Macedonian Question...' I want to talk about those who forced our Macedonian people to fight in the war and as a result lost their lives and about those who survived and were exiled and lost their ancestral lands... That's who I want to talk about..."

History recognizes tragic events like the separation of children from their parents. Regardless of motive, the violent separation of my child Doncho from his mother and me will always bear the hallmark of tragedy. The violent separation of a child from its parents is an immeasurable tragedy for both the child and the parents. The violent separation of thousands of children from their parents is a catastrophe not only for the individuals involved but also for the entire nation. This has happened to us. This catastrophic genocide has been perpetrated against the Macedonian people! And what do we do about it? We keep silent! We keep silent about a perpetrated evil! About this intentional injustice! There are no words that you can say to me that will convince me to believe that this was not intentional! The displacement of the Macedonian children from Greek occupied Macedonia was part of a planned strategy of ethnically cleansing Macedonia.

In the old days they killed a man because he entered the Exarchate Church in Kostur or because he entered the new Patriarchate Church belonging to Bishop Karavangelis. A man entering a foreign church... They considered this a strange act.

This naturally had tragic and devastating consequences for the Macedonian nation. Macedonians were being killed for practically nothing. This genocidal project was started in the beginning of the 20th century. And what did we do then? We kept silent. Here is what an Andart wrote about this in his book: 'While looking for living space for the Greek state, necessary for the economic and national survival of the Greeks, the first goal of the government in Athens was to acquire Macedonian lands but not with its population.' Even a blind man can see what this looked like... Even then, Greece wanted Macedonia without the Macedonian people! How blind could we have been, not to see that?"

Krapov became visibly upset after he said that. His dry, wrinkled face turned pale. Finding out from Kiratsa that their child had been forcibly taken from them by Queen Frederica not only proved that the Greek plan to eradicate the Macedonians from Macedonia was being implemented but it was carried out in such an unheard of tragic, frightening manner. On top of that, the Greek plan to eradicate the Macedonians became a personal reality for Krsto Krapov...

After his return from the island and after seeing his wife Kiratsa, who every day had to live in agony until she sank completely into depression, he remained without words... speechless.

He looked at me with a sad look on his face and said: "Now in my old age, I have realized that the truth and the facts can not be denied, they are on our side. Listen to me! My sad fate is the same fate that thousands of Macedonians share!

Several years ago, I decided to research this evil; the forceful removal of our underage children from our homes and the persecution of our villagers. For years I have read and collected everything that has been written, everything has been said by those

who remained here and by those who wandered off and are now roaming the world. I have come to believe that this was done on purpose by all Greeks, communists and fascists alike. It was a genocidal act ruthlessly perpetrated by the Greeks, enemies of the Macedonian people, for the sole purpose of taking our homes and lands. They have been slowly and progressively destroying the Macedonian family and home, by any means possible, to achieve their goal: ‘a Macedonia without Macedonians’.

As difficult as it was to believe what was being done to us, it was even more difficult to imagine a situation where young mothers, grandparents, brothers and sisters looked on helplessly while they ripped our children away from us and tormented our most loved ones.

In other words, what the Germans did to the Jews was child’s play in comparison to what Queen Frederica did to us,” concluded Krapov.

Krsto Krapov, from a very young age, lived and grew up in a neighbourhood full of Jewish people. Many of his peers and friends were Jews. These friendships unfortunately were interrupted during World War II when the Germans, led by Hitler, occupied Greece. At that time almost all the Jews were deported to various concentration camps and never returned to their homes in Kostur. Since then Krapov was tormented by the question: ‘Why did Hitler persecute the Jews so much more than the others?’ And now, only a few years later, this very ghastly genocidal act was being perpetrated against the Macedonians by the Greeks, led by Queen Frederica. They violently snatched Macedonian children from their mothers and sent them to camps in the dry Greek islands!/? Why?’” concluded Krapov.

Well, let us now have a look at what the ‘chronicles of military strategy’ have to say about these violent genocidal abductions called ‘save the children’ programs perpetrated by: A / Queen and Frederica, and B / by the communists who had the same goals!

Regarding this terrible endeavour that caused a lot of suffering for both mothers and children, Krapov said: “The queen found herself a winner but her conduct cannot just be compared to that of Hitler

alone, or to Beria of the Soviet Union who resettled thousands of people in Siberia when he found himself to be a winner. The Queen, with her cleverness, according to her propaganda, did this to protect the children and population in general from the terrible partisans!”

Let us have a look at the clever games they played and how they informed the world. Let us have a look at the historical data kept in the secret archives: “The motives and measures put forth by the Athens government for initiating the Pedomazoma” i.e. the removal of Macedonian children from their families and homes (A Measure of Understanding).

According to Klars Barentzen, both sides in the Greek Civil War did exactly the same thing; they removed children from the population. One side did exactly the same thing as the other. The reason and necessity for this were basically the same; to save the children. And from investigations carried out it was difficult to disclose what the exact motives were and who started the program first. And then there were Queen Frederica’s pedopolis’s (cities of children).

Fifty-four pedopolis’s were established across Greece in the period between 1947 and 1950. Twenty-three were established in Athens alone, eleven in Solun and the rest in Lerin, Kavala, Yanina, Volos, Lamia, Agrinio, Patra, as well as on the islands Leros, Corfu, Syros, Rhodes, Tinoena and Mitilini. And what was to be the role of the Macedonian children in these Greek pedopolis’s?

The Macedonian children were taught to be loyal citizens of the Greek state and, without reserve, the strong Greek nation, which was in accordance with the basic principles of traditional Greek nationalism. Greece was a nation – state, a state whose citizens were all members of the same homogeneous Greek nation, community and culture.

As for the partisans, DAG fighters in the ranks of the Communists and fathers and mothers of most of the Macedonian children forcibly taken from them; they were referred to as bandits, criminals and traitors. Here is what the Greeks had to say about them: “The partisans burned villages, destroyed homes, exterminated whole families, killed innocent people and, worse than that, kidnapped

Greek children from the hands of their mothers and sent them to enemy countries. The Greek soul now had the strength to arm itself and free the young Greeks in our country from these Slavic hordes. Fortunately for us our great Queen, our beloved mother, saved you from the clutches of the enemies of our country and gathered you in these pedopolis's (Gritzonas 1998, 124- 25).

So, now let us have a look at the ideology of the communists who were just as guilty as Queen Federica for the acts they perpetrated against the Macedonian family. Information gathered by UNSCOB and other sources shows that the mass evictions of children started in March 1948. We know, however, that several groups of children were taken in January 1948. According to Lars Barentzen (UNSCOB a / p 574. 30): "The evacuations began back in January 1948 but actively continued into March."

On the Greek government side, according to Queen Frederica's memoirs, it was clearly stated that the time chosen for taking the children was before the communists began to take them, which was immediately after the creation of the Royal Greek program for caring for children in June 1947. But available letters of complaints, found later, confirmed that many such programs were implemented, especially the program to collect the children, roughly about the same time as the government's propaganda began to blame the Communists for having committed the "Pedomazoma" (child collection program). The Queen's statements probably referred to the general relocation of villagers from the war zone when the government army had begun its campaigns which were, at the earliest, in 1947, at which time, naturally, they collected thousands of disabled people and children.

Let us also mention that the communist Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its declaration dated March 7, 1948, about Frederica's last order for collecting all the children in children's camps, said: "We are doing this solely because the queen is doing the same thing".

Maybe this had something to do with what the Greek government in Athens had disclosed the previous day, March 6, 1948, that the number of children taken was around 14,000. These children, according to the Greek government, were taken from the "bandit"

north regions. This information was obtained from British sources in Solun (British Department of Foreign Affairs: 868. 00 / 3-1948).

This news, which came eight days after the commencement of the propaganda campaign against the communist “Pedomazoma”, appears to be the first batch of formal news dispatched by the Athens government. This coincides with news dispatched by Athens newspapers, which disclosed that small groups of children had been evicted or had run away from their villages in Northern Greece, in the beginning of March, in order to save themselves from the violent seizures.

Similarly, at the same time, the Communist press began to broadcast complaints about the Greek government “taking children from their mothers”.

This was in agreement with an American press release which made reference to a time frame from January to March 1948 which confirms that: “The district administrators and the military cooperated to carry out Queen Frederica’s plan to abduct the children. Their aim was to take about 10,000 to 12,000 children. By March 31 they had abducted 6,240 children. (This was confirmed by the foreign aid IPA Foreign Relief Program, Greek mission, January-March 1948, p. 14.)

The American mission that was helping Greece (A. M. G.), for the month of April 1948, reported that the government accompanied the mission in its field expeditions and that “in reference to the same designated areas, it was prohibited from monitoring, but the mission estimated that the number of children seized totaled around 10,000”.

Even though UNSCOB was not directly involved officially, with the caution the Greek government took, on April 19, 1948, the Commission sent a questionnaire to the Greek Trustee and representative, to collect information about the number of children involved in the collection program implemented by the Greek government, just in the northern regions of Greece. The Greek representative responded on April 23, 1948 and said that they had collected 5,500 children ages 3 to 14 and that they had been removed from many regions in Macedonia and that approximately

2,150 children were housed in various centres in Solun. He also reported that around 5,000 children had been collected from Serres and Thrace. This work was supervised by order of the Ministry of Social Care. (UNSCOB Report / 754 (1948), p. 19.)

The press in Athens, on April 1, 1948, started publishing details of the government's share of collected children. In an article entitled "The first group of children arrived in Athens today" the newspaper "Kathimerini", among other things, wrote: "About 1000 children from the regions controlled by the bandits (DAG partisans) were transferred by boat from Solun to the village Kastri in Kafisia. A second group is due to arrive this morning, on April 2, in Piraeus and another, a third group is due to arrive in a few days. These children will be transferred to Patra and Syros."

A separate article in the same "Kathimerini" newspaper described a meeting that took place yesterday. Among other things the article wrote: "At 11 o'clock the previous day the queen received Mr. Tsaldaris, Vice President of the Greek government, and Mr. Gkrisgulnt with whom she had a long conversation. During the talks, the queen introduced the two gentlemen to each other and informed them of the successes and cooperation that had been achieved to date and thanked them for their share in the collection, relocation and care of the children torn away from the gangsters operating in the northern regions of Greece".

The newspaper wrote that these kinds of meetings were necessary and should be continued and that one such consultation was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the chairmanship of Tsaldaris. The newspaper made mention that such discussions were taking place in many Greek ministries and by American missionaries. There was also mention of the appointment of General Van Fleet as Head of the Special American Military Mission in Greece.

According to a report entitled "More committees and subcommittees" the child collection program was assisted "by the military commanders who operated in those areas".

During a consultation meeting it was decided to start a new committee under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Caring. This

committee was required to have the “exquisite task of developing a complete system of care for the displaced children”.

The article ends by discussing two options for the care of the children. One was about placing the children in humanitarian groups “where they will receive full education and care”, the other option was about “placing the children in the care of certain families, which were willing and had already made commitments to accept a large number of children and to provide for them”. With this approach the state budget would not be burdened with too many of these programs because the money, for at least six months of complete child care coverage, was going to be provided by Queen Frederica. (See “Kathimerini”, April 4, 1948.)

Now let us have a look at the motives and programs provided by the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece, DAG and the CPG.

Ominous 1948 – clear facts and dirty aims... In its short time in the Macedonian presence, the CPG managed to turn the age-old traditional family, rooted on its native soil, into a political family scattered all over the world...

The CPG leadership, regarding its role in the collection and evacuation of the Macedonian children, had its own motives which it explained as “a need to rescue the children from the horrors of the war”, but on a voluntary basis at the discretion of their own parents.

What exactly does that mean? It means that the action the CPG took, with help from the Macedonian organizations NOF and AFZH, had clean facts but dirty aims.

In other words, NOF and AFZH, who were the guardians of the Macedonian people, did nothing outside of what they were ordered by Zahariadis.

In order to obtain a clear and realistic understanding of the general Greek attitude towards the Macedonian people, regardless of which political regime is in power, be it the monarchists, republicans, liberals, democrats, authoritarians or communists, one must understand that Greece has a single policy with regards to the

Macedonians: “destroy the Macedonian people in order to have a Macedonia without Macedonians”. The CPG was a Greek political organization and its aims were no different; “get rid of the Macedonian people”. But, at the same time the CPG did not want to be directly responsible for such an “unlawful” genocidal act. So to avoid being blamed for the “abduction” of children, it made the act “voluntary” and, at the same time, it implemented the child collection program through NOF and AFZH. It put NOF and AFZH in charge of organizing the program and convincing the Macedonian population to give up its children voluntarily. By doing this the CPG solved two problems; one, it distanced itself from the actual collection and two, by working through the Macedonian organization it achieved a greater success than if it had worked on its own. The Macedonian people trusted the Macedonians a lot more than they trusted the Greeks. But then very quickly we found out that the CPG had other motives that were not “humanitarian”! This became apparent when the older children were brought back, trained to fight and sent to the fronts to engage the battle-seasoned Greek government military combat forces at the war front. The not so clear CPG motive was to turn these children into DAG fighters and solve its recruitment problem but without parental consent. Another not so clear CPG motive for the evacuation of the children was to free their parents and to fully engage them into every aspect of the war effort, which it did in 1948.

Now let us have look at what DAG had to say about this in its own reports. Very quickly after the Greek government first complained about the “bandits” kidnapping children, the DAG leadership confirmed that indeed there was such a program on its part that collected children and sent them outside of Greece, but it explained that it was done in order to save the children from the perils of the war.

On March 3, 1948 the radio program “Free Greece” confirmed the following: “The partisan (andart) radio station announced that under ‘agreement’ between countries that are members of the Cominform, Greek children between the ages 3 and 14 will be sent to Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, Romania, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. According to the same report, the people in these regions, controlled by the partisans (andarts), have made demands

through public boards to the partisans to organize a child care program for their children and to take these children to the democratic countries which have already given their consent for admission and for hospitality. Because if they don't the children will become victims of the American occupier. There the children will be able to continue with their schooling. March 3rd, 1948.”

The reaction of the second man in DAG command was: “The real, dignified and human endeavour of DAG is characterized by the government of Athens as... ‘Forcible collection of children’... ‘murder of children’ and ‘janissarism’. But the real forcible collection and acts of janissarism is done by Athens because many of the abducted children are children of the DAG partisan fighters, against whom the Greek government has committed unprecedented terror. These children have been abducted by fraud and are found in various so-called Queen Frederica schools in Leros, where in reality they are being turned into janissaries by teaching them that their parents are traitors and that they should be turned in to law enforcement and national security authorities.”

On March 15, 1948 the newspaper “Eksormisi”, published by the Democratic Army of Greece in the area of Mount Gramos, printed a notification from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Provisional Government, dated March 7, 1948, in which it attempted to explain its motives for this venture. In part the notification said: “The people’s and other organizations regarding the care of children in “Free Greece” and many thousands of parents and relatives have appealed to the humanitarian organizations in the people’s democratic countries and have asked them to take responsibility for the care of their children, who are in danger from the barbarism of the monarcho-fascists.

These humanitarian organizations, patrons of children’s organizations and various other youth organizations in these countries, have accepted the pleas of these parents with great joy and pleasure and have given their support to the Greek children, even if they need to take care of them for a long period of time.”

This means that after receiving all these “guarantees” from these humanitarian organizations, the CPG and the Provisional

Democratic Government decided to accept the appeals coming from the various people's organizations and from the parents of these children. With these guarantees the communists in Greece were able to satisfy all parental concerns and gain their approval to send the children out of the country until conditions in Greece were safe for their return." (10)

Furthermore the newspaper gave no concrete information about the timing of these events and the impact this very important decision would have on the status of affairs in Greece, but from what was said we can assume the following:

a / this disaster was created by the policies of the "Monarcho-Fascists".

b / there was a growing problem with feeding the children.

c / around 150,000 or more children were wandering around walking along the city, town and village roads. About ten children were dying each day.

d / Queen Frederica's decree ordering the Greek authorities to collect all the children, no matter where they were, turn them into janissaries and place them by force into the Greek Fascist youth organizations, certainly accelerated the need to do something. And finally,

e / the bombardment of towns and villages exposed the unprotected women and children to great dangers. More than 120 children were killed from bombs just recently.

The same newspaper, "Eksormisi", published a news article entitled "Women and children thank the Provisional Democratic Government and DAG" which, in part, said: "... a representative of this newspaper visited areas of 'Free Greece' and in his article he wrote that there were many parents in the villages under the Athens government control who came to the territory of 'Free Greece', to the free villages and signed petitions and made requests of National Council to take their children and send them with the other children. There were pleas from these people to have their children registered

for the mass evacuations along with all the other children from these villages. From mid-February to March 5, 1948 59 villages and 4,784 children were evacuated.”

At the same time, the newspaper provided the sequence of numbers under which children were enrolled and it did this for children from most of the villages which were identified by name. The same article also wrote that hundreds of telegrams were received from parents to express their gratitude to the Provisional Democratic Government. (11)

Two weeks later, on April 1, 1948, the newspaper “Eksormisi” wrote: “A large number of young children were loaded onto ox carts, horses, mules and donkeys and many raced on foot in long convoys in various different directions”. Writing about one such convoy, which arrived in a village late at night, the newspaper said: “Some of the children walked, others rode on horses, mules and donkeys and beside them were their mothers. They were from the villages Kondorabi, Kumanichevo, Bombaki, Tiolishta and Zagorichani. The youngest ones, feeling sleepy, were mounted on the donkeys. When the children were divided and separated for the night, the same mothers who brought them there stood and watched from afar, increasingly distancing themselves. They said goodbye to their children with tears and pain and with indescribable hatred for the Anglo-American occupiers and monarcho-fascists responsible for separating them from their children and for bringing misery to them!”

After that the newspaper published some statistics revealing the numbers of children that had been taken.

“Up to date, five groups have been sent. About 1,884 children with about 100 women to supervise them have been moved. Currently another 3 groups totaling 1,150 children are been prepared for travel.”

The same article also wrote: “In regards to enslaved Greece, the Monarcho-Fascist government in Athens has declared a wild war on the Greek children and their mothers. The army and militia are

active in conducting military expeditions in the villages and snatching small children from the arms of their mothers.

From the 150 children that the Monarcho-Fascists grabbed from the village Bouf, Lerin Region, their mothers managed to take 25 children back. This took place inside the Lerin Square, in the centre of the city. After that all the mothers marched together into the square, pleaded with the authorities and got all their children back.”

At the end the article claimed that, in areas of Alexandroupolis, government agents threatened to harm group of parents if they did not surrender their children so that they could collect them and take them to Queen Frederica’s camps.

Then the same newspaper, in a press release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece, dated March 7, 1948 and entitled “Parents and children begging the government” further stated that: “From mid-February to March 5, 1948 4,784 children from 59 villages, from the free territory of Greece, were freely given to the child collection program.” Similarly on March 20, 1948, the Interim Democratic Government decided to evacuate all the children up to the age of 14 and send them to Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Poland. According to available data, about 28,000 children were evacuated.

Now let us have a look at the motives and programs implemented by the Macedonian communists belonging to NOF and AFZH.

Were we Macedonians led with confidence by our own revolutionary experience and now we wanted to open a new period in the development of the Macedonian revolutionary tradition, or was this something else?

Let us now ask the question: “If NOF and AFZH were aware of the limits of what was possible, would they actually have gotten the Macedonian people involved in the Greek Civil War or did they naïvely take these steps?” The facts regarding the steps taken speak for themselves; improper and unprofessional steps were taken... the

outcome of events confirmed that, which turned out to be disastrous for the Macedonian people.

The call to the People's Front, we assume, meant that it was a call to save our Macedonian identity from the crisis in Greece, but it is a fact that the Macedonian person in the 20th century was following the footsteps of his identity. This aggressive agitation carried out by NOF was strengthened by strangers, especially by the CPY/CPM and by the mindset which Tsvetko Uzunovski instilled in NOF when he said: "Today Yugoslavia has become the revolutionary centre of the Balkans and the Macedonian question has become a Yugoslav question because the CPY created the political organizations NOF, AFZH and NOMS in the Aegean part of Macedonia, which you are now leading." The goal of these organizations was to give the Macedonians in Aegean Macedonia a Yugoslav orientation. As of then, the Macedonian people and the Macedonian movement were placed under CPY leadership. The Macedonian leaders from Aegean Macedonia were led to believe that they could fully achieve their goals only within federal Yugoslavia and that Aegean Macedonia was going to join Yugoslavia. (AM. Archive of Macedonia. F - 20 / 276, F - 20/196.)

Sadly, after the Macedonian organizations became subjugated by the CPG their orientation became completely different. It was no longer to unite with Yugoslavia but to fight against the Anglo-American occupier. In a broad sense the Macedonians were directed to "destroy the Anglo-American occupiers", which became an open wound for the Macedonian people, especially for the villagers. It was exactly at this time, at this stage of the war, that the Macedonian people were failed and the way for their destruction and exile was prepared.

Why did we go in that direction? What exactly did we have against the Anglo-Americans anyway? A great majority of our people lived in villages and knew nothing of communism. Many even went to America to make their fortunes and returned home to invest them. So what did they expect to gain by entering this war? It is time for the truth to come out.

Were we fighting against evil? It appears that we were directed to do exactly that. NOF with its slave mentality, obedience and bent spine, now, as it did in 1946, full of euphoria, took the lead in this dark crusade and organized this latest suffering. NOF and AFZH were left in the care of the CPY/CPM, the powerful Yugoslav centre, which governed them through directives.

It should openly be said that in this action with the children, NOF no longer represented anything. The fate of these children was placed in the hands of the CPG and DAG and so was the fate of their fathers and mothers.

But what is most important is that NOF never took control and could not have taken control, no matter what kind of action was taken with regards to the Macedonian children. That control was held by the CPG and DAG leaderships.

So the question is: “What would have happened if the 28,000 children had stayed in Greece and were able to return to their homes? Did NOF ask itself this question? Today we have thousands of examples that show forceful moves to foreign countries, but we moved because of CPG propaganda! Why?

Testimonies: Speech given by Nikos Zahariadis during the People’s Liberation Front Second Congress.

March 25, 1948

“...Thousands of children were saved and protected in the people’s democratic countries. And as such the Slavo-Macedonian nation is peaceful from this point of view.” (12).

How should we interpret this comforting gesture by the leader of the CPG and the Greek Civil War, about the “protection” of the Macedonian people...?!

The Macedonian people did not need to take such “big steps”. The Macedonian people did not need such ambitious national leaders (including NOF and AFZH), who always took “great strides” with every plan. The Macedonian people did not need leaders like

Zahariadis who trampled on their lives and turned their children into victims of this war, which he himself created. And at the end, the Macedonian people did not need to have their children “rescued” by the likes of Zahariadis so that they could become permanent wanderers of the world.

In that spirit, let us have a peek at the AFZH newspaper “Nova Makedonka” from September 1948:

“...Today we all cried. We were moved like never before. We sat under the shade of a poplar tree. None of us had slept. It was getting dark and we had to go to work, we worked during the night. And... here was our friend Tsveta from the AFZH. We rejoiced at her presence. When she is with us, I don't know why, but we are not afraid not even from the cannons.

This time she brought us letters from our children, who are in the people's republics. My hands shook as we read the letters. My heart was pounding hard because our children were so far away. It would have been so nice to have kissed them a little!

The airplanes come here. The artillery throws grenades at our villages. It is so beautiful that our government sent our children away to be saved.

Now our eyes fill with tears. They write to us and tell us that they live well... We always think of you they tell us, of your suffering in the war...

Poor children! When will we see them again? We will see them when we free ourselves. It will be beautiful... but in order for that to happen we need to defeat fascism. And to beat the Fascists we all need to fight hard and soon. And we fight by building trenches and bunkers.

This night we built three more bunkers. We are doing this so that our children can come back sooner and so that we and our husbands can return to our homes...”

Further on in the same newspaper we read: "... No, I am not leaving my friend, my sister, my brother to fight here while I leave with the children. I know they will be safe; I have full confidence in the elected people from AFZH. Being here I will contribute more to the struggle."

Does this not mean total surrender of the will of an individual to an outside force or ideological power? These are examples of unprecedented abuses of ideological power.

Taken by the mass euphoria, we believe in the birth of a new day. We were not familiar with the mass international struggle between the capitalist Empire in the west and the Communist Empire in the east.

Use of such controlled aggressive behaviour can be seen from the slogans that called upon the people to become involved which, for the Macedonian people, had tragic and devastating consequences.

Like Krapov said: History recognizes tragic events like the separation of children from their parents. Regardless of motive, the violent separation of a child from his mother will always bear the hallmark of tragedy. The violent separation of a child from its parents is an immeasurable tragedy for both the child and the parents. The violent separation of thousands of children from their parents is a catastrophe, not only for the individuals involved but also for the entire nation. This has happened to us. This catastrophic genocide has been perpetrated against the Macedonian people! The displacement of the Macedonian children from Greek occupied Macedonia was part of a planned strategy of ethnically cleansing Macedonia and the most recent history of the Macedonian people.

We walked along the famous cobblestone streets in Kostur, which once were called "Ribarska" (a place of fish) and spiritually felt at peace. Our eyes began to water.

Krapov said: “This was all done for us Macedonians, you know. In those days even if you found yourself in the right track, you would be run over just for standing there...”

Most of the time I kept silent while walking but at one point I said to Krapov: “You have lived a sad life!”

Krapov turned towards me, raised his head high and, with eyes half closed looking like a true martyr, said: “Yes, in those days, full of dirty lies and brother fighting against brother, it was my fate to be sad, as it was for so many Macedonians. Now here in Kostur a man is lucky if he even owns a grave. This is what we, the people of Kostur, have achieved with our sacrifices...”

What do you think my good friend? Can the human mind reconcile the fact that a person is prevented by the occupier of acquiring a grave so that he can be buried beside his ancestors?!

God, my God, I have a hard time believing that we are scattered all over the world. How can my persecuted family be buried all over the world, in Tashkent, in Zgozelets and in Brala?”

I wanted to ask him something but he continued: “Here, and I believe it is also the same in the entire world, on ‘mrtov den’ (day of the dead) a river of people used to flow towards the Kostur cemetery despite the cold winter, which freezes people to the bone, or the warm summer, which is hot as hell. We used to greet each other with what was traditional for this day, with the greeting: “Let them rest in peace. May their bones be anointed and may they not divide themselves as freedom fighters and communists. May God forgive their sins!’ But now I say nothing and only think of those greetings when I pass people by.

My wish is that their descendants live on so that there will be someone to remember them. Perhaps God will determine the time when the truth comes out... and reveal how they were stabbed in the back...

And now, on top of their suffering, for years they had to put up with being mocked for their physical handicaps from the war. They lived

the rest of their lives with no purpose and in constant pain. No one understood their pain. And based on the mocking of people who notice their physical disabilities, no one respects them. No one knew their mental anguish; let alone what they had done for their people. No one even cared what these gifted fighters had done for Macedonia and for Kostur during their days as Macedonian freedom fighters and rebels,” concluded Krapov.

After he stopped talking, he looked down. I looked at him and noticed that his cheeks looked dark, probably from the suffering he had endured in the past. He carried with him his sorrow, pain and pride of his old family lineage from Olga Ivanova – Vorontsova - Velichkova, on his mother’s side. Kiriana, better known as Kiratsa in Kostur, got her name from Kiro Velichkov, a priest who completed his liturgical studies in Leningrad where he met and married Olga Ivanova. Pop Kiro was slain by the andart Pavlos Melas.

Krapov raised his head and, as if he knew what I was thinking, looked at me and said: “You know, the love between Kiratsa and I was an endless dream, endlessly complex, more complex than a rainbow full of colours. Kiratsa belonged to her meek people in an ordinary world. When I returned home and saw her, she looked very beautiful, even without make-up.”

Krapov looked down again and after a moment of contemplation said: “I was often asked why I became a freedom fighter at such a young age? And I would say ‘great love is rare, as rare as great works’.

There was much pride, love and support among the people of Kostur, who joyfully strolled over this cobblestone street. They felt pride and spiritual peace while leisurely walking down with their first love...

Kostur gave birth to the most beautiful girls... The women of Kostur, tied to their home as they were, were responsible for cooking, looking after the children and the older people. They washed the clothes, cleaned the house, guest rooms and cupboards. They swept the courtyards and pruned and watered the roses... Today all that is

gone. It is so far away that it seems like it was only a dream... a distant memory. The only thing that was left for me, which I thought of every day, was my thoughts of her..." concluded Krapov and begun to sing:

"I fell in love with a girl from Kostur
The girl fell ill
Her beautiful face turned pale, oh, oh, oh
Her dark eyes closed..."

Chapter seven – Secret way to the “fratricidal Cemetery” in Strashilovo

The day before the “Golema Bogoroditsa” (Great Virgin Mother) holiday, waves of warm air and ghostly silence caused anxiety, anger and restlessness in the souls of the people who stood there and waited for twenty minutes for Krsto Krapov to arrive. Krsto was going to take us to the “fratricidal cemetery”, but when he arrived he said: “The place there is wilderness. No one has maintained it for half a century. The trees have overgrown and everything has changed; there is not even a path now. But I will take you there because I want to visit the bones of my brother.” Krsto’s mouth was dry and he had trouble speaking, especially about the horrible things that he was about to tell us...

Mount Vicho is an untamed wilderness with its beautiful sharp peak, dense forests covered with tall beech trees and with its many water springs. Kostur can be seen from its peak which, from this distance, looks like it is resting in a hand. The Lerin fields can also be seen from there. Many Macedonian freedom fighters and their enemies have died here during the Ilinden era and during the 1940’s fighting to protect their homeland. The place is littered with the bones of the bravest Macedonian heroes.

“Only the bravest climbed Vicho and only they were capable of meeting the bears and wolves face to face,” said Krapov.

We were moving like tired horses. When we passed through open spaces the sun relentlessly beat down on our heads and backs. Our pace was strange too as we felt like our feet were bound with rusty iron chains. We walked on top of sharp rocks all covered in green grass and moss. And all the while we felt like we were surrounded by blood-thirsty beasts lurking around us in the thick forest.

The place has gone wild, everything has changed and now fear rules the land... Our concern for our past has brought us here, a half a century later. Our need to be here has given us the courage to overcome our fears...

We stood there agape in the pious silence while we looked around long and hard at everything and listened to the various noises in the wild...

With a sad look on our faces we passed by dead villages that had once thrived. We walked over the old paths, now overgrown with grass and brush, and avoid stepping on the rubble. Taking pictures are now the only sounds made that disturb the peace. We took photographs of the ruined houses with open doors and broken windows. Often we were startled by birds flying out of the ruins, landing on the tall trees and curiously looking down on us.

The fruit trees, whatever was left of them, have already lost their fruit. The over-ripe fruit had fallen off the trees onto the dry grass where it was rotting. Every one of us took photographs to record this historic occasion and to show our friends back home...

“The people who lived under the Mountains in Vicho, Kukuli, Rundzel, and as far as the eyes can see, are now gone and no one knows where they are. All we know is that they are not here, they are gone forever...” said Krapov and cried out: “People! We are here! This is the great “fratricidal cemetery”! Buried here are the bones of our fathers and brothers!”

I looked at Krapov and thought to myself: “Thank God! We finally arrived! We finally found the place described in a blood-stained letter a half a century ago!”

As soon as we arrived Krapov sought out the special trees and looked for signs written on them that identified the exact spot of the cemetery. Enjoying the aroma of Zdravets (geraniums) and lavender made my eyes shine and made me feel like I was falling in love for the second time with my native land. I walked around feeling nostalgic and remembering the aroma and colours of flowers, which reminded me of my deceased mother whose garden was full of roses.

We walked for about five to six hours, listening to Krapov narrate detailed segments of our tragic history, testifying to the “fratricide” that took place in this dark forest.

When the sky became red and the golden rays of the rising sun in the pure blue sky sparkled in the far east, a white winged bird peacefully and serenely took to flight. It seemed like the old bird wanted to welcome us in this beautiful green and peaceful valley full of aromatic scents. The bird flew towards the mountain peak and disappeared in the clear blue sky. The peaceful silence slowly crept along the paths of dawn. It was a unique moment for all of us, which felt like our hearts were tied to every moment, to every sight of nature.

Unfortunately those feelings were short and fleeting and we were quickly reminded why we were here. That's when we began to feel the turmoil, the darkness of Satan inside us, the heavy bells of Hades ringing inside of our heads.

As we approached the entrance of the cemetery, we felt like lightning had struck the ground, a huge underground tomb opened up and swallowed the sky with its flaming tongue. Along the way the ground was sloping and covered with large intertwined roots sticking out of the barren soil. Awestruck by the sight we took many quiet, gentle and unsure steps, strangely creeping towards the great "fratricidal cemetery".

Perhaps somewhere in the cemetery there will be something written to indicate whose bones are buried where or at least who is buried here. Everyone went on a search looking here and there, slowing down and asking questions, trying to identify to whom the bones belonged; father, grandfather, brother, uncle, cousin, friend, villager... calling out the name and then moving on to the next grave hoping to find what they are looking for. Some looked up towards the sky and stared at the blue. Then, suddenly, we heard an insidious scary giggle coming from high above and wondered: "What could it be? What was happening? Perhaps the assassins were up there puling on the strings of our destiny?"

We all heard the giggling sound and looked up. We then heard a voice saying: "The bones are yours but the mountains are now ours!"

We all rushed out of the wooded area and found ourselves in front of a stone avalanche...

As the stones passed us by we felt the freshness of the air, we all felt sweat run down our necks, but our attention was focused towards the Strashilov Vir locality.

When we arrived at the old branchless tree we could not help but stare at the shiny moon that was so shiny, its golden rays were reflecting on the water in Strashilov Vir locality, which further verified that we were indeed in the right cemetery.

The next thing we did after that was trample over the thick ferns and tall mountain grass. We were all intoxicated by the aroma emanating from the crushed ferns. After that we each left to pursue our own personal quest. At that point Krapov approached me and said: "Under us lie the bones of our fathers and brothers..."

For some reason we felt compelled to whisper or keep silent, perhaps because we were afraid. Then, after coughing out loud, one person said: "This is the scariest place at night because wild beasts lurk in the thick ferns and we have invaded their territory. Perhaps this is God's will that we too die here like our fathers..."

Krapov, at that point, turned towards the mountain and said: "The people who lived under the mountain peaks Vicho, Kukuli and Rundzel were caught between the gunfire coming from both the tops and bottoms of the mountains. The ELAS fighters were firing from the top while the Kostur freedom fighters were firing from the bottom.

At that time the people in these villages were on constant alert, every day dashing here and there trying to do their chores while yelling and crying. Their cries, pleas and curses were heard in heaven, especially after their homes were burned to ashes and they, who survived this calamity, were forced to leave their ancestral land forever. Everyone who lived here in war time had a story. Unfortunately, with every passing year, more and more of those who fled have died and their stories died with them.

Krapov suddenly looked strange, like a poor shepherd who had lost his flock. He then wiped his tears and continued:

“The bloodiest drama took place here in this meadow,” he said. “The Macedonian freedom fighters were murdered right here. Special fighters from the ranks of ELAS were selected to gather and liquidate the Macedonian freedom fighters who had already left the Macedonian rebel bands and had joined ELAS. They were murdered with daggers. The ELAS fighters responsible for liquidating them had orders not to shoot them. They were ordered to take them alive and slaughter them like lambs, one by one. They did that here in this meadow... committed their sins to achieve their dreams and to destroy ours... This is where the lights went out for our Kostur heroes and protectors of our homeland and identity... here is where they fell in silence, which no one now remembers. Let this day be a day of recollection, of tribute to our fathers and brothers whose blood was spilled here half a century ago...” said Krapov with watery eyes and then went silent.

I remained silent that entire night! I was dumbfounded by Krapov’s testimony and by the cold night air which extracted the heat from my body, leaving me trembling. Everything looked pale under the light of the moon.

Everything was silent now in this new-found cemetery. Not like the days when it was our fate for our cemeteries to multiply, a time when our bones were crushed every day of our lives.

I remained alone and to my own thoughts the rest of the night until morning. I took the opportunity to reflect on many things. My only desire was to still remain alone and from the looks of the others, I was sure everyone felt the same way. The break of dawn drew my eyes to the heavens and I watched the sky slowly change colours until it eventually turned blue. Another furtive giggle came from the heights above, followed by the words: “You have left your dead un-avenged and forgotten.”

What will historians write about this? I thought. Nothing!

I got up and walked around as if someone invisible was guiding me. I wondered who was laughing at us.

Perhaps it was one of the assassins looking down on us, pulling the strings of our fate? Maybe I imagined it... maybe we all imagined it because we were feeling burdened by the search for the bones of our fathers and brothers?

As I stood there, my blood boiling and seeing stars, I got the feeling that I was caught in a time vortex and was opening wounds...

I remembered this night, between the covers of night and day, and all day and night I thought about history and arrived at the closed steel gates. I was looking for traces of my father's footprints but I did not find them... They had been covered up a long time ago, washed away by the rain of bullets.

It is night now. The moon is dim and we are all alone, even though we are all together. No one speaks, no one understands and no one remembers. All the bones are here without the likeness or the form of human skeletons.

I tried to remember my father's smile as I sat on top of his grave, looking down at his bones. I thought of many things from our past, the joys and good times we had when I was a growing, young boy sitting on his lap. At the same time I am trying to quiet the tear in my right eye, about to drop on the palm bone of my father's hand. I want to ask him: "Dear father, do you think of me? Do you remember how I was growing in your hands... or have you forgotten me because you were afraid and felt chills under your skin and twinkling fingers in the palms of your hands?! You know that your hand was the most trusted thing that protected me. I always looked for it... And in this black dawn I still persistently look for the shadow of your hand. Your hand for me has always been a faithful, fatherly shield."

My words ran out. My mind went blank. Everything was mixed up, everything was wrong, it was the wrong time. And like the people of Kostur often said: "Where the hell did the Greeks come from?"

There was no answer, only silence and emptiness in this dark dawn. I felt sick deep down inside of me.

Morning was nearing, the new blood-red sun was about to be reborn in the east.

At that very moment, a child sitting in the lap of a young woman who had traveled there to visit the grave of her grandfather, who was a Macedonian freedom fighter, began to cry wanting to be breastfed and as its tear fell on the scattered bones it marked the beginning of fifty years of historic Macedonian destiny...

What will historians one day write about these people? Nothing! No one will even mention them. They will not be mentioned anywhere!

Suddenly there was a mighty roar. I was startled... I was overcome with fear... There was no doubt in my mind that a big bear was coming... This was bear country and the place where we were standing was its territory...

Krapov stood still and listened in silence. As I watched him I thought the reason we are filled with so much fear is because all this time he spoke about so many horrible and frightening things.

What other choice did he have? We needed to know what happened and he needed to let us know. Had he kept silent and told us nothing, the curse would have continued because no matter how terrible the truth is, it must be known and remembered. One cannot sleep over the bones of dead people and not know the truth about how they died, no matter how horrible. There are many frightening things that have happened about which people have written. Many frightening things have happened to these people, to our people, about whom we need to write. Even about the owner of the knife which he drowned in blood. It is impossible to forget the shining blade of the dagger that cut the throats and gouged the eyes and other parts of our ancestors, and more recently the throats of our brothers, who, one by one, waited their turn to be slaughtered like lambs while their comrades watched the executioner stain his hands with their blood. How can twisted faced Mite the butcher be forgotten, whose face became twisted and warped from his evil-doing, from playing with

his knife and cutting heads off as if he was harvesting ripe watermelons. How can we forget his fits of anger while stepping over the spilled blood of our brothers, fuming, engulfed in this great ideological fraud.

The war was raging all over... that's how I remember it.

I don't know what a researcher will write about us and all our people. Probably nothing! The people will probably not be mentioned anywhere!?

I remember when Kostur and Kostur Region smelled of death and when the Greek communists were offering us "Brotherhood and Unity". That was not done in the interest of peace, but in the interest of power...

Everything was done in the name of the people. The ELAS fighters were full of egoism, hatred and lies and were ready to commit violence against the Macedonian freedom fighters. There was a lot of misconduct and fighting. Anything was possible! Morality and immorality!

ELAS from the left, with the "Brotherhood and Unity" integration project, continued to pit Macedonian against Macedonian. It was important for the Greeks that we be part of such a project... until we became strangers in our own country... Time has shown that Siantos (CPG) and Tempo's (CPY/CPM) tricks worked and they were successful in pitting brother against brother.

Only the Macedonian freedom fighters were proud people and aware of our history, of our revolutionary struggles, of Ilinden, and had dedicated their lives in the defense of Kostur until they all died. They had no other homeland. The Macedonians who were outwitted by the communists, on the other hand, found themselves wandering around the world because, as it turned out, they were not "Greeks by genus".

Krapov lit a cigarette and began to smoke it while talking without interruption. He was full of questions about our past, about our people who lived here and cultivated these lands; about the people who cut wood from these forests and grass from these meadows; about the shepherds who herded the sheep and sometimes laughed deep from their hearts when they were told how many of us now live abroad.

While visiting the “fratricidal cemetery” I found a yellowed piece of paper in my vest pocket and on it I wrote: “Why are we Macedonians, everyone against everyone?! Why are all against all?!”

We are people that equally feel pain. We cry and feel sad the same way. Today we found the cemetery and the bones of those who fought and died as brother fighting against brother, but have we learned everything? Half a century later we found the cemetery with their bones...

But, the people from those times are now gone. The people from these villages who dashed around every day yelling, cursing and crying are now all gone. The people whose voices and cries were heard in the heavens are gone. The people whose cries were heard while leaving their native lands, cursing while leaving their flaming homes burning left everything and, half a century later, have not returned.

Suddenly there was another mighty roar. I was again startled in the dark and there was no doubt in my mind that a big bear was approaching. This has been its territory and home for many years...

Chapter eight – Cries of a trumpet before the “fratricidal cemetery”

1. We welcomed the morning lying on top of the bones of our fathers and brothers. Today was “Golema Bogoroditsa” (Great Virgin Mother), an important Christian holiday when all the people from the Kostur villages pay tribute to the Virgin Mary. This holiday is celebrated annually on August 15th and I don’t remember ever forgetting to celebrate it.

Krapov was feeling a bit stiff when he asked: “What do you want to do now?” He was also feeling a bit shaken because all night he had been thinking dark thoughts. At one point he felt like proudly taking a stroll through the ferns in the dark, the same way the Ilinden rebels used to do when they were on patrol all night. But, as he used to say with a smile on his face: “People don’t like my lifestyle as a rebel...”

That’s how he was! Moral values in his life were very important. His greatest desire was to be helpful to his people. He was interested in science and in the history of Macedonia and the Macedonian people. He also loved to argue about history and about the evil inflicted against the Macedonians. A person was able to talk to him about everything. Even about immortality. He once said: “One day life will be dedicated to the wise but the fools won’t know what to do, even in an eternity.”

It seemed like the blood flowing through his veins was Macedonian history, he remembered everything evil that had been inflicted on our people by the Greeks. Many people testified to the fact that he was very brave and able to reveal the truth about Kostur and about the people of Kostur and to tell exactly what really happened in those terrible days, from then until now, revealing everything.

Krsto Krapov was all excited to get going, to be of service to the people he was guiding. Every pore, cell and nerve throughout his body was pulsing nervously. His excitement elevated the restlessness in each one of us and we too were ready to move. We were all feeling nervous as if we did not belong here, as if we were strangers in our own country.

After a short break we all gathered together and sat on the trampled ferns, contemplating what this new day might bring, while Krapov our guide, sometimes squatting sometimes pacing around, recounted his stories. A moment later he turned his eyes towards me and said: “All things that happened here are not recorded in history. We have no idea what the other face of history looks like. We only know about those who followed the path of power with no return. They will forever remain slaves to their choices, and if they truly realized their dream, for as long as they existed, they would have sunk into a deep depression. And who were they? And why did they behave this way? They were part of the Kostur Macedonian freedom fighters who fled from the ranks of the Macedonian rebels and joined the ranks of ELAS. They did this because the Communist Party of Greece and ELAS calculated that the greatest evil and the greatest threat to Greece were the Macedonian freedom fighters against whom they organized pursuers for their removal, and these are now our most beloved people whose bones we find here.

One autumn day an order was issued by ELAS Headquarters to capture the rebels, which read: ‘You are to capture and liquidate a group of 24 or more rebels who have left and are heading north.’ This information was sent to Major Arianos and to V. Himaros, Commander in Chief of ELAS in Kostur and Kostur Region.

They were informed about this well-thought out mission by Baskakis, a former officer of the Greek Army now major in the ranks of ELAS, who also shared the glory of this mission’s final outcome. It was a well-thought out mission indeed!” concluded Krapov.

I sat beside a burial mound and I couldn’t help myself but cry as I listened to Krsto Krapov tell the story.

Later, when I got close to Krapov, I said: “I was overcome by indescribable fear. I am afraid of physical pain. I am afraid of the life we have lived, of death which has passed me by several times... Every person who knows the limits of suffering is free of fear, as if they have a remedy for such fears.”

Krapov, feeling like a soldier who had fought for his country, got up and turned towards me and, as if wanting to change the subject in an attempt to calm me down, said: “No one really knows how many people were slaughtered here that damned night. Even the birds that now fly out of the old nests could still smell the blood. This part of our country was drenched in Macedonian blood; the blood of our fathers and brothers who were slaughtered here. Unfortunately history until now has said nothing about those who fought here for their national freedom, for their honour and Macedonian birthright. The only thing history has said is what the communists and ELAS wrote, which amounted to nothing. The communists anathematized the Macedonian rebels because they were against their ideology. They especially hated them because they were followers of Ilinden...

Well, today history is what the communists wrote, which is not only biased to reflect their point of view but also very sparse. Now if we look at the history written by the Greek authorities we will find that Macedonians in general do not exist and everything is Greek, everything is within the framework of Megali Elada.

What do we celebrate today? Ilinden? Is this Macedonia from those historic days or is this perhaps a likeness of a great tomb? Awful things have happened here!

Yes, my Macedonia remembers all this, but the centuries-old persecution of my ancestors scares me. When we suffer our country also suffers. We have been fleeing our country too long and that alone carries a heavy weight in my soul.

It is hard to live under ideological pressures when you know so many secrets; like who killed the Macedonian freedom fighters in Kostur. It is hard to live with such secrets and painful memories, which some of us have to endure while remaining silent. Worse than that is to keep silent for a century while lies are passed on as truth. We lost many of our people to the CPG, who became internationalists and are now far away from our homeland with no hope of ever returning.

Yes, it was exactly here, in Kostur, that Macedonian blood began to flood our native Macedonia. The commanders were all here when they were running out of ammunition and the fighters resorted to fighting hand-to-hand combat with daggers, sabres, bayonets and stones. The commanders were Chakalarov from Smrdesh, Kole from Mokreni, Kote from Rulia, Mitre Vlaot and Kole from Konomladi, Kostadinov from the Kastenaria, Krshakov from Kosinets, Gelev from Trsie, Kocho and Trpche from Turie, Kole from Dobrolishte, Alekso from Ekshi-Su, Pando from Banitsa, Lazar Pop - Traikov, Kuzo the teacher from Blatsa, Hristov from Prilep, Petrov from Zhupanshta (for whom many songs are sung), the Colonel Jankov from Zagorichani and many others. These people and all the rebels gathered together in churches where they took the oath of allegiance to Macedonia...” concluded Krapov.

I looked at Krapov and said: “We Macedonians lived in a world of lies for a long time and now we still have to live sorrowful lives like vagabonds... like we are at fault for everything wrong that has happened in the world...”

Krapov stood up and, in a raised tone of voice, said: “This is our country damn it! We need to have faith in the love of our native land! We all know that the Greeks have been trying to rip it out of our souls. We have been through tough times and many of us have been exposed to temptations. We have been beaten down. We have been abused, denied, trodden down and insulted. We are filled with deep scars and insults. We have been called derogatory names... We have even abused each other by one side calling the other ‘Bugaromani’ and the other calling the first ‘Grkomani’”.

All those in ELAS, the communists, the Royalists, the priests and the teachers who existed among us Macedonians, were all cunningly poisoning and cleansing our minds and making us think of all sorts of negative things, especially about ourselves. They told us lies and assured us that they were the truth. They wanted our Macedonia for themselves but without Macedonians. They didn’t need the Macedonian people because, in time, they brought Christian Turks from Asia Minor. And that has been happening to this day...

Now that we are looking at the bones of our ancestors we are consciously struggling with the prejudices of our neighbours and even with our own prejudices. Still we are not convinced that we exist and that we are responsible for our own lives and destiny. We are looking at the bones of our predecessors and are becoming more confident in ourselves and in what we want; which is the same thing they wanted; our Macedonia. But, at the same time we feel insecure...

We are a strange people, we allow things to happen... we allow destiny to flow... We wander around while being persecuted and we feel it is not our time to be persecuted... we feel what is happening is not happening to us... everything feels alien to us... Some of us have disassociated ourselves from our homeland and feel like its not ours... They say before the world that Kostur belongs to the Greeks... And what do we say about that? Nothing!"

Krapov stopped talking and looked at me, expecting some sort of response. I felt guilty because I had nothing to say, so I said: "I feel for everything you have said, but don't expect a snap answer from me. I can tell you what bothers me right now and that is, will we be able to find the bones we are looking for?... and perhaps after we will remember the old era and will be able to tell our grandchildren about it..."

I gave him an answer, but an answer that he did not expect. Krapov looked at me with a strange look in his eyes and said: "Are we so ordinary that we get sick and suffer from ordinary things? Do we just pass our time on the road of evil, in bitter times, on top of the leftover bones and graves of the heroic fighters who sacrificed their lives to defend Macedonia?"

Instead of healing ourselves from the cursed ills of fratricide and all other ills that led us to abandon our homeland, for years now we have been listening to foreign gods and ignoring the disease that has been eating away at us. It is time to face up to the truth, shake off the spell we have been under and break the shackles of bondage. These strangers took away everything they could from us and we have done nothing to remedy the situation! Let's face it; the reason our fathers and brothers, who fought on both sides of the war against

each other, are here is because they are Macedonians, period! They fought each other because their foreign gods made them do that; they created the circumstances by manipulating both what they loved and what they hated. The same bronze church bell that rang for joy also rang for their funerals. A guilt which we, the living, will now have to bear for them for being so gullible...”

After saying that, Krapov looked exhausted but quickly recovered and said: “... ‘We choose our gods – we choose our fate’... isn’t that what Virgil the Roman poet once said?”

Krapov looked at me with a forgiving look, as if saying, well we all make mistakes, and continued: “We will remember the Ilinden Uprising and our grandfathers, the Balkan wars, the First World War and our fathers, the Second World War and the heroic Macedonian freedom fighters, the Macedonians in ELAS who fought against the Macedonian freedom fighters, our fathers and brothers who were tortured on the Greek islands, the Greek Civil War 1946 – 1949 and the ethnic cleansing, and the eternal search for the bones of our dead. We will forever remember our fatherland that was taken away from us and that we can never go back to because we are not ‘Greeks by genus’.

It was a golden opportunity for the Greeks in ELAS and for the Greek communists. The Greek communists, with their propaganda, succeeded in brainwashing the Macedonian population into accepting the ‘ideological tattoo’, which lasted up to the end of the Greek Civil War. The CPG and the Greek communists shackled the Macedonian population and did whatever they wanted to it... With their strategies, the communists succeeded in convincing a large portion of the Macedonian people that the Kostur Macedonian freedom fighters were the greatest evil in the land. This part of our past tells me that all the great sufferings that took place was actually done at the behest of the ideological Macedonian activists in ELAS who agitated, perhaps unbeknownst to them, to have us all exterminated.

Did we Macedonians have faith in the CPM/CPY Central Committee that Macedonia was going to be reunited as we were told by NOF and AFZH? As it turned out, it was not possible. Also, by

the time it became clear to us, we were already swept by the winds of doom and branded with the mark of the ideological tattoo. Putting it another way, joining the Greek Civil War was one of the greatest mistakes we ever made. We allowed this stupidity to take place and fought like lions against each other, and when the war was over we were exiled from our homeland... We ran like cats up a tree in fear of a stray dog.

Today we look at our true history. Today we look at our bones. We look at actual crimes that were committed right here,” concluded Krapov.

As I mentioned earlier: “One autumn day, an order was issued by ELAS Headquarters to capture the Macedonian freedom fighters in Kostur, which read: ‘You are to capture and liquidate a group of 24 or more rebels who have left and are heading north.’ This information was sent to Major Arianos and to V. Himaros, Commander in Chief of ELAS in Kostur and Kostur Region.

They were informed about this well-thought out mission by Baskakis, a former officer of the Greek Army now major in the ranks of ELAS, who also shared the glory of this mission’s final outcome. It was a well-thought out mission indeed!” concluded Krapov.

Krapov looked down for a moment, as if gathering his thoughts, and said: “Aristotelis Arianos, commander of the infantry battalion, paced around inside the dark room in the village house where he was stationed for a few days. By now they had decided who and how many ELAS fighters were going to participate in the liquidation of the group of 24 or so Macedonian freedom fighters who were fleeing north and were hiding somewhere in Strashilovo locality between the villages Turie and Bapchor.

Speaking to Baskakis, Arianos, pacing back and forth, said: “You made a good choice. It is good that you have chosen to take the most recent of the arrivals from the ranks of the rebels. Is it true that they have Greek influence and we can we trust them? Now go and ask

them to show us how good and loyal Greek citizens they are or send them back into the ranks.’ ‘Leave it to me!’ answered Baskakis and explained that even though these rebels (Macedonian freedom fighters) were some of the fiercest fighters they were doing this to save their own necks.

The pursuing squad, consisting of former rebels who had joined ELAS, was exclusively made up of Macedonians who were now under the influence of the ELAS communist Macedonians. The pursuing squad was also approved by the ELAS Commander in Kostur, whose plan was to have Macedonians killing Macedonians.’

As if not believing what had been done, Krapov tightened his lips, shook his head and said: “How cunning of General Headquarters! The craftiness of Arianos and Himaros! The moment those fools finished the job of killing their own fathers and brothers they were brought back to base and, one by one, liquidated by chosen ELAS fighters who were loyal to Greece. And this is exactly what happened!

These chosen ELAS fighters would enter the forest, disappear into the tall grass and ferns, then reappear, a while later, sweating with blood-stained daggers in their hands. The cries of those slaughtered could be heard for miles, except their screams were masked by machine gun fire. The machine gun burst lasted only a second but its echoes over the mountains lasted long enough to cover the gruesome sounds of people being murdered...

Those on watch did not know who was firing, but when they saw the dead body being carried away they figured it was a revenge killing... a retaliatory killing by fanatical rebels for having left their ranks and joining ELAS. The people were told it was a revenge killing by a group of rebels for having killed the 24 rebels that were north. Very few people knew the truth; that all these killings and murders were organized and carried out by ELAS units in order to liquidate the freedom fighters in Kostur.

Our people used to say: ‘When a man believes he is loved, he becomes crude and knows nothing of what awaits him...’

It was like that Indeed! My grandfather used to say: ‘You should never trust a Greek, like you never trust that a rabid fox will not bite you...’ This is exactly what happened to those Macedonians who left the rebel bands and joined the ranks of ELAS... They were stupid to trust the Greeks and to think that the Greeks would love them for killing their own... They were fools to believe and respect the ‘communist brotherhood’! This is what happens to people who refuse to take lessons from history or to even learn from their own mistakes!

Look at what happened to us in the end. When the Macedonians left they found themselves exiled from their own ancestral lands. Do you think that was done by accident? No! It was a perpetrated act... committed by design... But some people, even today, have difficulty believing that!

People are generally guided by emotion and not by facts and arguments. They refuse to believe that the ideology for which they fought so hard could have worked against them. In those days, like we do today, we were led more by our emotions than by reason... that is why we took the road to oblivion. Unfortunately, not one from the NOF or AFZH leaders was called to answer why and how we lost Kostur and our entire fatherland when the communist ideals were flourishing from 1941 to 1949! No ideological activist was punished for causing this disaster against our people... In fact many of the ‘ideological activists’ were rewarded and celebrated as loyal fighters of the Communist Party,” concluded Krapov and suddenly stopped talking.

I looked in his direction. His eyes were tearing as he tried to compose himself. I slowly turned and looked away. A moment later, eyes still dripping with tears, he began to tell me what the gravedigger of the “fratricidal cemetery” had told him. He said: “That was then... The Macedonian communists in the ranks of ELAS had accepted the idea that the rebels (Macedonian freedom fighters) had to be liquidated. The Macedonians belonging to the CPG and ELAS, it seems, were slaves to the general communist ideology and did not care about the cruelty and inhuman treatment inflicted on their opponents, including on those who expressed

Macedonian feelings and aspirations for an independent Macedonian state.”

Here is a brief excerpt from what Krapov had told me about the rebels. He said: “... a rebel does not obey... he knows how to communicate. He is proud. He never wished to be unfair. He follows the truth. He accepts and returns and remembers both good and evil... The rebel sings, dreams, works and knows that he will feel pain for what he does for his place of birth... His temperament is often blustery, rebellious, violent and wild. He is often bright and endlessly patriotic...” that’s what I remember.

The last thing that Krapov said to us about the rebels, as I remember it, was: “The lie was converted into truth and truth into a lie. The ideologues were masters at their job... Those who do not resent evil are its promoters...” After that we all sat in silence.

Saddened by our parting, Krapov came over to me, gave me a big hug and began to cry on my chest.

At daybreak, when the first rays of the sun appeared out of the clear blue sky and hit the top of the mountains high above, a white-winged bird, peacefully and serenely flew over us. It seemed like it wanted to greet us, to welcome us to the peaceful green valley full of morning dew and a variety of aromas. The bird circled around and flew up towards the mountain peak and disappeared in the deep blue sky. The terrain was completely peaceful at the break of dawn. It was a special moment for all of us... a once in a lifetime moment. It felt like our hearts belonged to nature...

As we began our departure we felt uneasy. We felt the turmoil and the darkness of Satan inside of us, the heavy bells of Hades ringing inside of our heads. As we approached the exit of the cemetery, we felt like lightning had struck the ground and a huge underground tomb had opened up and swallowed the sky, with its flaming tongue. Along the way the ground was sloping and covered with large intertwined roots sticking out of the barren soil. It was a frightening sight. We took many quiet, gentle and unsure steps, strangely creeping out of the great “fratricidal cemetery”. We felt both pain

and excitement from what we had seen and experienced here. Now we will at least be able to write what we have seen and what we discovered about the bones we found.

Today, the Greeks and many other nations mark many victories. What do we mark? Do we even mark our tragedies? We are victims of exoduses, massacres, slavery and assimilation. There is not even a single small monument anywhere here in Kostur that commemorates our tragedies, our loss of hundreds of thousands of Macedonians who fought and fell for their ideological strategies in foreign armies. Our homes and villages were burned down and our people were forced to flee... as far away as Tashkent...

I looked at Krapov and noticed that he was looking up. He was looking at the clear blue sky. We again heard the insidious scary giggle coming from above. Who might that be? Who was laughing at us? Perhaps it was the executioners and assassins of those whose bones are resting in the cemetery... perhaps they are pulling the strings of our destiny?!

We all heard the insidious giggle followed by an evil sounding voice which said: "The bones are yours but the mountains are now ours!"

We all kept silent. How could we accept such fate? Then Krapov loudly spoke up and said: "This country of ours is soaked with our blood and it is up to us to tell its story in our future history. Someone must take the initiative to record its memories. If no one does, all will be lost. I stayed behind... I took the task... Even though these memories were painful and ate away at me, I swore that I would do everything in my power to the end of my life to record them so that one day our future generations could have their Macedonian history; with all our known and unknown Macedonian heroes.

Chapter nine – Instead of tears...

Instead of crying in front of the skeleton of his mother, who was hung in the name of the revolution, Vancho, son of Lina and Lambro, also known as Johnny, who had just arrived for a visit from Canada, decided to say a few words about his beloved mother. He said: “You mother, in letters you sent to my father, wrote: ‘I am looking after our offspring in the white mansion with hedges and white gates, in the flower garden and yard in the open sun, in our garden where the rainbow appears in the well where children quench their thirst... We await your return our dearest...!’

Now mother you are all alone, your skeleton swinging from this tall old tree and with your shadow you keep its roots cool. I noticed, dear mother, from the tears you shed for father and for us, your children... I noticed a dried up marsh...

I know those who brought you misery and death are underground...!’”

Krapov walked over and knelt by the tall tree, staring up at the skeleton that slowly swung back and forth. He then spoke to Johnny. He said: “That was an ominous year (1948) for the Macedonian people. It was a time when people made many mistakes and were led in the wrong direction. The entire Macedonian nation was under attack by deception and by dirty tricks to achieve dirty goals. Their aim was to leave the Macedonian home without children, to remove the Macedonian people from their centuries old homes, to destroy the traditional Macedonian family and turn it into a political family. But the most shameful thing about all this is that Macedonian organizations took part in it. NOF and AFZH, both created in Yugoslavia on April 23, 1945, took part in it. This was a shameful and genocidal act against humanity – for the Party to take the children away from their families in the name of the people!

This cannot be tolerated!

This happened only here in Greek occupied Macedonia and has been ongoing since the Greeks arrived here.

Here in Greek occupied Macedonia under this Greek occupation, we Macedonians have no possibility of living a normal life. Conditions have been created so that if we want to live normal and happy lives we need to leave... go elsewhere outside of our homeland... which will achieve our occupier's goal - to have a Macedonia without Macedonians.

The first genocidal step was taken by Queen Frederica, then it was followed by the communists. It is strange that both sides did this with Macedonian subjects," concluded Krapov.

"It was a time of much vanity, egotism, hatred and acts of violence," replied Johnny, who, after living for 65 years in Canada and the United States, came to visit the grave of his mother, a grave which did not exist but he found remnants of her skeleton still hanging high up in the tall tree, used as gallows by the communists during the Greek Civil War (1945- 1949).

It was mid-March 1948 when preparations for collecting the children were underway, but the women whose husbands were in America and Australia had not received approval for their children to be collected.

Panic had gripped these mothers and they worried and cried until late night.

During the last night before the children were collected, no one knew what was going through Lina Bogdanova's mind. That day she was dressed in her best clothes and gave the impression of a diligent person, confident in herself. She was loyal, honest and attached to her husband Lambro, who at the time was working in America. But now she had to be careful.

An old man became very upset when a woman from AFZH pushed him aside and grabbed his grandchildren from his hands, without

even giving him a chance to say goodbye. On top of that she yelled at him and said: “Old man, this is a revolution, we have orders from above. The leadership ordered us to do this...”

Lina witnessed this but said nothing. She kept silent and sighed a heavy sigh. Her body began to shake and she felt very anxious. Her dress was drenched in sweat and she kept wiping her forehead. She could barely stand up and kept trying to keep her balance. Then finally, under great duress, she said to the woman from AFZH: “It is important for our men to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’, to giving our children or not. Is there anything holier; is there anything more loving than to have your child with you, so that your heart does not wither? Please... I can’t give you my children without my husband’s permission, without my Lambro knowing... Why did I give birth to them... so that the Party can have them? My sorrow is too great...”

But even before she was finished speaking, Lina heard voices yelling: “She is right! Please don’t take our children from us...” Lina was openly saying the same thing to all the AFZH women. She would often say: “History has shown that bad things have happened to us Macedonians in situations like this... We have witnessed things like this before and there is only one outcome... our extermination... our exile from our grandfather’s hearth... Forgive me if my testimony sounds arrogant but it is better to die here than in exile all over the world. I wholeheartedly want my children, to whom I gave birth, to stay here at home with me. This endeavour, which the communists and you AFZH women have undertaken, is a systematic destruction of our roots.”

The AFZH women were very, very resentful of Lina. One of them sternly looked at Lina and coldly asked: “What should we make of all these things you are saying? We and the Communist Party are fighting for a better tomorrow. I believe that we Macedonians should be at the front line doing our best to achieve our freedom and the freedom of all the Macedonian people.”

To that Lina Bogdanova answered: “These people here, including myself, don’t see it that way so please no more, I don’t want to hear your stories.” These arguments continued on until late at night.

During the night Lina again dreamt the same dream. When the door opened again and a terrible man slowly approached her, Lina wanted to yell but she couldn't. At that very moment, however, she jumped out of bed and found herself in a strange situation between a bad dream and an AFZH woman who had just arrived at her door and was about to reassure her to give up her children.

The AFZH woman proudly asked Lina: "You do believe in the Party, right?"

Lina replied: "We Macedonians are unaware of how far we have to go in this war in order to find the place where we belong. So why should I believe? So that we can play the winners and victims game? To give you my children? What kind of people sacrifice their own children?!"

My grandfathers, grandmothers and all reasonable people have raised children and now we have to give them the Party? My father used to say: 'In our suffering as Macedonian people the children had been the pillars of our families. Our survival as Macedonians depends on them staying here and guarding our ancestral homes and lands!' concluded Lina.

Donka Shokleva, of the AFZH, then yelled at Lina and said: "Come to your senses!"

That fateful night in 1948, after the noises died and silence crept throughout the village streets, Lina continue to think of a way to save her children. She lit her kerosene lamp dimly and sat down beside the beds where her children were sleeping and listened to their hearts beat like clocks. It must be three o'clock by now she thought to herself. It was still dark outside. Should she flee with her children during the night? If she did she could run into guards and that would be fatal. What times do we live in when a person is not afraid of death but is afraid of the evil situation in which they find themselves... She was not sure what to do... she was overcome with fear... She paced back and forth... She went to the icon of the Virgin Mary, crossed herself and prayed for salvation. Two thoughts circled around in her mind: "To send her children or not to send them!" Not to send them became the dominant thought.

She quietly went near the fireplace. Her determination was absolute: following her wish that hurt her most. She took the pot full of boiling water off the tripod and separated the burning kindling. She carefully took a step and stopped to take a breath. The pot with boiling water started to boil over as Lina came closer and closer to her sleeping children.

She stopped for a moment and looked at her sleeping children. She smiled gently but the smile quickly disappeared when she thought of the AFZH woman. She felt like her legs were cut off. She sat on the floor and watched her children and felt their warm faces.

The same thoughts kept circling through Lina's mind: "Do I want a life without my children? No I don't, I love them much too much to let them go! Something is holding me by my hands and pulling me into a big black hole. Oh, my dear beautiful children how peacefully you sleep."

Her thoughts flowed uncontrollably one after another and something inside of her subconsciously said: "What are you waiting for? Only then will you save them..."

Some things she could not bear to watch. She could not agree with what the others were doing. It was not in her heart and soul... she belonged to another world... a mother to not be able to reach out to her children? Where is the 'pleasure' in that?

She again looked at her children and decided that she was going to do it. It would not be long... their pain would pass sooner than the pain she would have to endure if she lost them. "I don't want to give them to the AFZH women. They are not going to make child soldiers out of my children and force them to fight and kill for their interests... They killed my father because he was a priest," she said to herself.

"But what if they remain crippled?" she said to herself and kept thinking about it, wondering what their lives would be like. She hesitated and for a moment she forgot everything.

“I must not think of the worst,” she said to herself. “They will remain with me... and I will remain true to my husband and to my birthright... Exactly like that: consistency and fidelity. When Lambro set off for America he said: ‘Lina please look after our children so that I can go to America, make some money and return...’ and now these idiots call him a fascist and an American spy...”

The silence was disturbing. Lina closed her eyes, gathered her strength and suddenly spilled the pot of boiling water on her children’s feet. But when she heard the painful cries and gasps, she fell over them and poured the rest of the boiled water over their entire bodies. She screamed with a painful voice and thought to herself that maybe it would be better for everyone if we are all dead...

The frightened children squeezed themselves into her arms and she, powerless, gently, and with tears in her eyes, kissed their burned feet and said to herself: “Who knows why but it seems to me that if I cry, it means that I behave like a good mother. And there is nothing to be blamed for. And my children will have nothing to be angry about... they will remain with me...”

“We love you mother... We will always love you...” they said with shining eyes full of fear like they had never imagined. “You are mine and I will not give you to anyone...” she said and again kissed their burns.

At the crack of dawn when the first light appeared she examined their burns and was horrified to discover that their blisters were full of blood and were becoming very painful.

But the worst thing was when she heard the voices of the activists calling out: “You vile woman, what did your children do to you for you to have done this to them?” And in reply she said to herself: “I did not kill them! They will be alive! They will be mine!”

Sotir Gaidov, Lina’s brother, suddenly appeared at her door. He directed his gaze at the bed where the scalded children were lying and saw the horror in their weeping eyes. He then sat across from

his sister and wanted to personally hear the truth from her. Lina looked at him with wide open eyes and he addressed her with the words: “Sister, where were your eyes? What happened? Oh, the horror!”

Lina, trying to hide her fear and motherly pain, said: “I do not know if I behaved properly... I may be cracking up!” Then suddenly she looked like a child, confused and embarrassed. “But I think you will understand,” she said. “How would you feel if they took something from you that you loved very much and you knew that they were going to do it in front of your eyes? I swear to God... If they take my children I will go mad... Perhaps I have sinned... I may be frantic but I will not give away my children. They are mine and Lambro’s who left me to bring them up and not to give them to anyone.”

She was strong and persevered more than all the women in the village but she was unable to express her true feelings and explain her actions to her brother.

“Oh, my brother, for a long time now our lives have not been in God’s hands but in the hands of our persecutors. So how can I give my children to the Communists who beheaded our old father Gligor Gaidov down at the brook and we found him robbed of his life just because he was a priest. Our father wronged no one, he was a priest who served God and prayed for all the people.” Puzzled by her rambling Sotir asked: “Sister, what exactly are you trying to tell me? I was told that you tripped, stumbled and spilled the kettle with boiling water. Is that true?... She gave him a strange look and with fear in her voice she said: “I am not giving my children to anyone... I watched over them all night.”

The children began crying again but not as loud as when they had been scalded. Their uncle, Sotir, looked at them with a sad look on his face and felt sorry for them. Their names were Elena and Mito. A woman dressed in a uniform stormed up the stairs and entered the room. It was the AFZH woman and she was accompanied by two activists who were planning tomorrow’s actions to collect the children and transport them to Yugoslavia and their mothers to the DAG front lines. The moment Donka, the AFZH woman, entered

the room she started blinking her eyes, reacting to the bright flames emanating from the blazing fire in the fireplace.

The AFZH woman moved away from Lina so that she could have a better look at her and, as a concerned organizer of the holy struggle and accountable to the Party and to General Markos, make her assessment of the situation. After having had a good look at Lina she said: “We and the Communist Party are fighting for a better tomorrow. I think we Macedonians should be the first in line to give our best and by doing so we will achieve freedom for the Macedonian people. Only by doing our best can we guarantee that and show that our people are loyal to this holy war. For example yesterday Temelkovski, the Trsie village teacher, collected all the children into a group and took them all the way to the border without any problems. Afterwards their mothers left to join the ranks of DAG, respecting the decisions of NOF, AFZH and the CPG.”

After that the AFZH woman had some questions: “Have you alone decided to commit this heinous act or did someone, perhaps one of the enemies of our holy war, put you up to this? Is that it or is it something else? Tell the truth! Perhaps there was another woman with you? Everything you tell me will be kept in strict confidence. Perhaps she can help us with the investigation?” Hurt by the woman’s words, Lina closed her eyes and said: “You people destroyed our lives and now you want to take our children.” The AFZH woman looked at her with a cold stare and said: “It is stupid of you to talk like that. What could this possibly mean to you? You are only repeating the words of our enemies.” She then nodded her head, gave a slight smile and, together with the other activists, left.

Sotir, with his hands on his hips, stood there and watched the whole thing. Then shaking his head he pleaded with his sister to calm down. Finally at dawn, when the village children were all taken away like lambs to the Yugoslav border, everyone calmed down and gave Lina odd stares. But disappointed by what they themselves had done, full of grief, they found some hope in Lina’s decision not to give up her children.

A trumpet was heard playing one spring morning in “Dlaboka Iama” camp near the village Besfina. The campers were all standing while

Lina, looking like a majestic warrior, gently walked under the noose that hung under a tall oak tree. In spite of the numerous people in the vicinity, the place was dead silent... Lina, looking up at the gallows, said to herself: "Oh dear God they will hang me!" She turned toward the sun and yelled out: "Goodbye forever my dear children!"

When the trumpet stopped playing, Karanikas, the military judge, said: "Death to fascism and to our enemies!"

Chapter ten – Taste of salt water

Taste of salt water (a record of Macedonian hell)

How difficult is it to follow you, father!
Don't utter a sound of pain,
Even though you hurt so much!
Don't say a word about your plight,
About your suffering,
About your worries,
About your bitterness - and not so much about your screams!

(Blaze Koneski, from the "Black ram", 1993)

When I thought about my father I felt courageous. He used to say to the Greeks: "I am Macedonian, gentlemen, nothing else but Macedonian, so you can go to hell. I would die as a Macedonian because no one has the right to take that away from me." He would then look at me with raised shoulders and once again say: "I used to say to the police chief that we are Macedonians and I don't want to hear anything else from you... That's what I used to say to him. Look here Mr. Police Chief, I used to say to him, we don't mind you being Greeks so why do you mind so much that we are Macedonians?"

Today is May 1st and just as I arrived at the city square the street parade ended and the streets started to empty. I looked at my telegram which read: "I will be arriving at 12 o'clock. Wait for me at the station. Your brother Giorgi. Stop."

It was warm outside. I was feeling uneasy deep down inside of me. The platform was full of people. In the crowd my brother kept raising himself, standing on his toes, looking for me. We stared at each other for a long time as if wanting to ask each other who we were.

I approached him first and hugged him. He picked me up in his arms. After that, while still holding each other, we went to the "shelter for the Aegeans."

So many years have passed and I don't know what to say to him. For years I have been dreaming about him coming here to our native land. I welcomed him with a glass full of red wine and asked him to tell me his painful story.

He took a sip of wine and gave me a great big smile, seeming as if his bleeding heart was about to open and I was ready to listen attentively.

He began by saying: "Listen brother, I will tell you everything you want to know about what happened to us.... They caught us outside of the village, about an hour's walk from here. They surrounded our cabin in broad daylight. The dogs were barking furiously frightening the sheep, which in turn were bleating loudly. Our big grey dog was tied inside and barked the loudest while pulling on its chain furiously. One of the soldiers, an officer, was knocking hard on the door with the butt of his rifle and his fist. The surrounded cabin was teeming with armed soldiers aiming their guns and bayonets at us. The big dog barked relentlessly and growled viciously. It stretched its chain to the limit and bravely lunged at the door where the officer was knocking. After knocking for a while the officer yelled out: "I will kill you all! Open the door!" The officer was a fierce looking man with wide black eyebrows. He had his pistol out ready to shoot us. We looked outside at our barn on the other side of the threshing field; it was burning like a bonfire.

Father and I were terrified and after a while we decided to glance through the cracks of the door. The whole place was teeming with armed men and in front of us stood several dangerous looking men, the kind we called 'burandari' who belonged to the Greek army.

Suddenly they broke the door, grabbed me and tossed me in front of the officer and, like I said, the entire place was teeming with armed men. The officer asked me: 'Whose kid are you?' Of course he knew everything. I said: 'Risto Tsigulovski's'. The man asked me again and several of them pointed their guns at me. Several went inside the cabin and began to look around. The next thing I saw was them dragging father out. They tied us both up and took us to the village Bapchor. All the way there they kept hitting us with the butts of their rifles, kicking us with their boots, punching us with their

fists... all the way to the destination they abused us. There they brought us in front of a man who was sprawled out in his chair looking like he was having a nap. After they dropped us on the floor he got up and asked: 'Tell us where they are hiding the Macedonian squad Vicho?' and then whipped us across our backs with his whip.

Mad like a wild cat, the man said to father: 'Where are your older boys, Risto?' Before father had a chance to say anything I interrupted and said: 'They went to fight for their human rights, Sir, they went to fight for our freedom, so that we can speak our mother tongue, so that we can go to school and have great men like yourself, and as a people we can have everything...' My dear brother, I told him everything. Then he started hitting us, others joined in and they too hit us with everything they could get their hands on and continued to hit us until they locked us in a cold storage room that substituted for a dungeon.

We looked outside through a tiny window, it was raining something awful. It rained all day and all night. Father and I were concerned about our sheep left alone and unattended. What was going to happen to them? Sad, father said: 'God help us, we are in a terrible jam...'

Poor father then began to weep and said: 'Giorgi we screwed up. The sheep are now left out all alone and unattended and are in peril. But the truth is the truth and it was time we told the truth... You did what you had to...' The poor man was truly sad. He continued: 'The whole nation needs to stand up and fight for our rights and not hide in their shirts... It was different during Ottoman times... at least we could speak our language freely...' he said. Early the next day they tied us up and took us to Kostur. When we arrived we saw many people looking at us. There they took us to the Jewish school. Then, on March 12, 1947, when the military court was established in Kostur, they took us to trial. They produced all kinds of witnesses who criticized us a lot, especially those who had caught us. They accused us of wanting to create a Macedonian state, of providing food to the Macedonian partisans and all sorts of other ridiculous things... Poor father could not take it any more so he said: 'Sir, can you not see how we live? We are citizens yet we live like slaves. All we want is to be free to speak our language, to learn our ways...

You came here to our country, we did not come to yours...’ But before father had a chance to finish, the judge jumped him and hit him in the mouth and broke two of his teeth. I got very angry and I wanted to defend father.

As he kept hitting father, the judge kept yelling furiously: ‘You are Greeks and nothing else!’ I began to yell in Macedonian and father wanted to say something but his mouth was full of blood so he kept motioning with his hands ‘No!’, ‘No!’, ‘No!’ Finally he spit the blood on the floor and yelled out: ‘We are Macedonians!’ I jumped in and said: ‘Listen Sir, it doesn’t bother us that you are Greeks; why are you so tormented that we are Macedonians? You know very well that we have lived here in our ancestral lands since time immemorial. Ask any educated person and they will tell you that... We are not asking you to become Macedonians but it would be nice if people are left alone to be who they are... who their mothers bore them to be...’

In the end, in spite of what we said, the judge still sentenced us to ten years imprisonment. On July 15, 1947 they took us by truck to Solun and dumped us on a train. The cars were truly dirty and seemed like they had not been washed since Ottoman times. They would not give us water and let’s not even talk about food. Thank God father was there with me, he gave me courage... Poor father, he kept talking to me throughout the entire trip. When we arrived in Athens at the ‘Pavlos Melas’ prison, for eight days they fed us salted fish and a bit of bread. It was very hot in Athens, especially when they took us out of the prison, loaded us on trucks, took us to the train station, loaded us on the train and from there they dumped us into the bowels of a ship. Father and I were tied up and we looked at each other wondering where they were taking us. We were very thirsty but there was no water to drink... for anyone...

We heard people whispering, asking where they were taking us... No one knew. After a while it got quiet and we all fell asleep on the floor of the bottom of the ship like animals. It was still dark and we could not see a thing when we heard noises coming from above. Someone yelled: ‘Everyone out!’ This was the first time I had seen an island; land surrounded by water. Looking at all that water made me realize how thirsty we were. We were so thirsty we could not

speak. We got off the ship one by one. My father and I, still tied together, walked one behind the other while we were being hit with sticks... on our heads, bodies and especially on our legs...

We walked for about an hour and a quarter and then we saw the tents. They gathered us all together in front of a person in authority and told us to line up one behind the other and then began to search us. To keep us in line they whipped us with their sticks. We wore no hats so it was especially painful being hit on the head. We screamed and protested but they did not care. We were not allowed to have forks, knives, watches, cigarettes and as they confiscated them they further beat us with their sticks. Many of us protested about that too but they did not care. We lost most of our clothing, shoes and other items on the way here.

Finally we were allowed to go to the tents. Unfortunately there was no water... by now our mouths were so dry our tongues were sticking to them. We heard someone say: 'There is a well over there!' so we all ran to it like sheep. It was not a well but a shallow puddle, about a metre deep. We soon realized that it was salt water but we were so thirsty we drank and drank, but no matter how much we drank we were thirstier than when we started. Soon we all began to have terrible diarrhea. What can I tell you, we all got diarrhea, there was not a single person who did not get it. There were no toilets, only some holes dug in the ground below our tents. We were all crouching there naked... Soon after a terrible stench rose and I am telling you this because our tents were only steps away. However, we were not ashamed of what happened and we soon became used to the bad smell. It was not exactly our fault for what happened to us... The worst thing that happened to us was not the smell... it was the prison guards who would not leave us alone... we always had to humble ourselves before them even though we hated them with a passion...

Now when I think of father, how he wandered around all alone, looking after our sheep... but now I couldn't tell him anything. I often called out to him: 'Father, it's me Giorgi.' He would then go away... the other way. This is how he was... he often knelt under the icon of the Virgin Mary and prayed to her to look after us... to protect us from worse evils...

The only time our souls felt at peace was when we thought about our past. I often spoke to the sun, which made me think of all the times I drank sour milk. I drank it at home when the weather was hot. I drank it and I felt cool all over. Not really, but I managed to convince my brain that I felt cooler. I spent countless sleepless nights looking up and thinking of home, planning what to do but nothing materialized. They separated me from my father and put me with Fote Mechkarov. He constantly told me things... complaining about his own troubles. Sometimes I listened and sometimes I didn't. I was constantly hungry. One day, I don't remember the exact date, Fote said 'Georgi, do you hunger for some bread?' 'Of course I do!' I replied. He then said, 'Come with me'. We went to a big iron box full of garbage. It was during the night. We began to pick out small chunks of bread and ate them. Some were dirty and some were moldy but we did not care. We couldn't see them in the dark anyway. We ate and ate. Hunger was an awful thing... We had no idea who threw the bread out and why. Some time later my stomach began to ache and I rushed towards the toilets. Unfortunately the guards did not allow unscheduled visits to the toilets. On my way I looked back and in the dark I saw someone with a long stick running after me, attempting to hit me. I turned away and began to run through the tents. He continued to run after me. Thank God I escaped but he continued to look for me in the tents. I crossed myself and thanked God for giving me the strength to outrun him or I would have been beaten to a pulp.

One day, I don't remember the exact date, there was no bread. They put us to work hungry with nothing to eat. The next day the same thing. This continued for seven days. By then we were so hungry we could not see properly. No one was going to the toilets either... It was scary... Hunger and thirst are scary things. We completely lost our strength and our morale... however little we had. We had no shoes and we had to walk on sharp stones barefoot. Go ahead... try it... walk barefoot on hot sharp stones, see if you can! We were cursed! We were born to endure pain and humiliation. I often thought we were cursed and born to suffer.

Every day we stood in line for our meal. It was so little it was not worth it but we were so hungry. Often, for no apparent reason, we

were attacked and beaten by the guards for standing in line. Those who stood at the front of the line near the cauldron were always beaten. One time they hit a man in the eye. I don't remember his name. The guards took his eye out and the man fell on the ground. The guard then became frightened as we all began to yell, 'Why would you do such a thing!' Soon many of them rushed to the scene and began to beat us. They then tipped the cauldron and spilled our food on the ground. There was no food for us that day...

One other day, at 12 o'clock, we were returning to our tents as usual. On our way back we always had to carry a stone so that we did not return empty handed. That day I was carrying a large stone. The Greeks who were jailed amongst us, having committed crimes such as theft and murder, never carried stones. They walked amongst us and, just before reaching our destination, they would grab our stones by force and if we complained they would tell the guards that we were lying. As I was carrying this large stone, I looked back and saw one of those Greeks making his way towards me. He grabbed my stone but I refused to let it go so he pushed me and I fell down. Those who did not bring a stone back did not get food. No stone no food, that was the deal! Still refusing to let go of the stone, I fell down with it in my hand. Look here at this hand, I am missing four of my fingers... because of the cursed stone... when I fell it crushed my fingers. The bastard took my stone anyway so there was no food for me that day. I was hungry and in pain all night long. I did not know what to do. I drank some salt water... I can still taste it... my hand kept bleeding. The doctors that were there in the jails asked me what happened. I told them 'I don't know... The island Giura began to turn on me and I fell,' that's what I told them.

After that things got worse for me. I couldn't work but they kept pushing me anyway. They didn't believe me that I was in pain. It was better working than having to kneel in front of those bastards all day long acting submissive like a captured beast that had been beaten. They kept talking about how much money the Greek state paid for what we were doing and how they taught us how to do this kind of work. They kept telling us that we should be grateful for the nice things the Greek state was doing for us and for giving us the opportunity to regenerate. But I will tell you this; a person can

understand people well not by what gains they have made in life but by the similar sufferings they have experienced and every soul is left pure... We were all repulsed by the smell of the food, which smelled like cat barf and which made us feel like losing all the humanity in us; love, friendship, envy, mercy, compassion... slowly disappearing from us... evaporating under the bright sunlight. But there were spies in the prison amongst us. There were many but there was this one guy I know of, his name was Stratos. We did not dare complain about anything...

One day a loaded ship arrived. It was loaded with iron, cement, lime and other things. It was loaded to the top. They gathered us all together at the side of it and placed a couple of boards, one to get on the ship and the other to get off it. All day long we worked offloading things while the guards beat us with sticks. My biggest concern was not to get dizzy and fall into the sea. This happened to a man from the Voden or Lerin Region villages, I don't remember which village, he fell into the sea with a full bag of lime and drowned... May God bless his soul... Where would he have learned to swim? The sailors pulled him out and left him out in the sun. He was left there all day long and by the end of the day he was covered with flies. The captain felt sorry for us and during the evening he let us bury the man... and, by that, gave us a small break from the hard work.

No one spoke at the man's funeral. This is how it was with us here at the prison for many years. Many had died and no one spoke at their funeral. People died from all sorts of sicknesses; tuberculosis, stomach and intestinal problems, etc. A lot of people became mad after a priest started coming to our camps, preaching to us about all those commandments of God's while we listened to him hungry. One day, it was Christmas I think, when he again came to tell us things. After talking a while one of us said to him: 'Look here father, look at the kind of foul food we eat and disgusting water we drink, is this how God intended us to be according your religion?' They grab our people, having done nothing wrong, and bring them to these islands, only because they were born by a different mother, only because they are not Greek. Then I opened my mouth and said: 'Dear father, if you are God's child, you must tell the truth... what is ours, ours will remain... that's the way it is...' There is nothing

more to say. The priest kept staring at me like he was paralyzed. I got angry and said, ‘What do you say about these things? Does your book say it is okay, it is human, to do all these things to us, eh? Tell me... answer my question!’ The priest stormed out angry and left us and, like the good Samaritan that he was, he reported us to the authorities.

One day early in the morning the island was surrounded by military ships ready to pulverize us. The priest, among other things, had told the authorities that we were planning an uprising; that we were hardened revolutionaries and refused to receive any of God’s commandments. We all came out and looked around that morning. That’s when we realized that there were many camps on the same island; we were not the only ones. Many of our people (Macedonians) had been sent to the islands. Included amongst them were communists, both Greeks and Macedonians, thieves, murderers... Then we saw them chasing a large group of women and corralling them on a wide slope. I looked for my father but he was nowhere to be found...

Many of these people were running wild, hungry and thirsty... being tormented they lost their minds. Later they forced us to build yards for the mad, with high walls. Many died in those yards... Everyone needs to be told about this... Everyone should know what happened to us... People need to write books about it...

Then came the time to release us from the prisons; it was in the fifties. I came back to our village and found it burned down. Everything was flattened to the ground, there were no people left either. I went down to our small barn and found father wandering around... looking for our lost sheep. I couldn’t say anything to him... I called to him: ‘Father, it’s me Giorgi.’ When he heard my voice he ran off...

Yes, dear brother, this is how it was with us. The Greeks chased us off and we fled everywhere...” concluded my brother.

He then looked me in the eye and said: “You are crying; I know you are sad about father, about our home, about our barns, fields, meadows, gardens... I don’t know if you know but our cemetery has

been destroyed and ploughed over... The Greeks have decided to leave no mark, to erase everything about us... to erase everything about our existence...”

Chapter eleven – “Chair” a Shelter for the Aegeans

May 1963

One Hundred Years of Silence – Remarks made by open-minded people

“Evildoers will never be revolutionaries, they will always be reactionaries.” (Vladimir Nobakov)

“Born in me is the need to say: Why I love the world, why I admire it and why I am grateful...” (Nikiforos Vretakos)

Who brought the evil that made brother fight against brother? How and why did we lose Kostur between 1940 and 1950? Whoever did this they brought death not only to the people of Kostur but to a part of our nation. We the persecuted have been waiting for answers for more than half a century now and we want to know whose is at fault and who is to be blamed for this catastrophe!

Studies have shown that the ideology brought to Greek occupied Macedonia and introduced to the Macedonian people in the period between 1940 and 1949 resulted in many sacrifices, including loss of lives and expulsions, sacrifices made not for the Macedonian cause but for foreign political gains. This is a great tragedy for our people and for our homeland... A great history written in Macedonian blood...

Research conducted for this book, from a literary and historical point of view, aims to answer several questions:

How and why was the “Macedonian syndrome” (brother fighting against brother) activated by this ideological activism conducted over the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia during the Second World War and during the Greek Civil War periods?

With what kind of strategic objective was NOF organized and what actually drove us to pick a military option? Was this our strategic objective or did strangers organize it through the ideological activism (operatives of strategic tasks) conducted over our people?

Why have we remained silent on this subject for over half a century knowing full well that we were obliged to comfortably guide policies in favour of Greece?

Were we, the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia, through the strategic option we picked, intellectually and politically capable of militarily preserving the territorial integrity of Greek occupied Macedonia and the compactness of the Macedonian population after the Second World War when the international state borders in Greece and Yugoslavia also became military boundaries between the two camps (east and west)?

Why did we reject the alternative of not “winning” against our enemy and not leaving our ancestral Macedonian home?

It seems that history is not as accurate in recording past events as they happened. It is more like an account of cataloging certain preferred beliefs. And as George Orwell (13) once said in his novel “1984”, history is always written by the winners and those who have control over writing history books.

It is undisputed that the creation of the “Kostur freedom fighting units” was a bold move in the creation of a national resistance program for the protection of the Macedonian people in the region from the cruelty and inhuman terror perpetrated by the Greek government. Very little is known, to this day, about the Greek aims in persecuting the indigenous Macedonian population in its ancestral home.

Many significant events remain unknown and those which are known have not been sufficiently communicated. Many stories have shortcomings and are full of mistakes, also the storytellers are getting very old and passing on and those who are still alive... their memories are fading. There is still a lot to be written... more light needs to be shed in order to preserve and safeguard our story for our precious future generations so that the mistakes we made are not repeated.

The story of the “Fratricidal Cemetery” is a real case which I carried with me for more than 65 years. If I did not tell it now I would have had to keep it to myself forever.

We the people from this part of (Greek occupied) Macedonia, who have survived the genocide (punished for not being guilty), bear the many scars the occupiers and perpetrators have inflicted on us. Our scars may be old but they are permanent and have lasted to this day.

We Macedonians, when we write our history about the Macedonian activists, must not refer to them as heroes and traitors... we need to realize that they were all persons who performed certain activities at a certain time. History is not destiny. We need to start changing our people’s consciousness so that they can be more open minded and have a greater tolerance. We the Macedonians from Kostur Region, from 1940 (internally Macedonian freedom fighters and externally Macedonian communists and ELAS fighters) to this day have remained divided and have lost our homes in Kostur.

The dirty politics spread by the communists and by the ELAS fighters against the Macedonian freedom fighters in Kostur Region reached such a high level of evil that it caused brother to fight against brother!

This kind of dirty politics was spread by CPG and CPY politicians who aimed to increase their political power by bending the will of the people. This kind of politics regularly chose easier solutions and always relied on the care of someone in authority and in a powerful position, which operated through directives. This is what happened to us Macedonians, especially during the Greek Civil War (1945 - 1949), when we operated under CPG, CPY and CPM directives.

As a result of this kind of dirty politics and from not having a Macedonian strategy, the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia not only lost many lives fighting an alien war but, in the end, lost their native hearth forever. The Kostur freedom fighters were exterminated and towards the end of the Greek Civil War, both Macedonian communists and Macedonian ELAS fighters took the role of being more fighters for Yugoslavia and communism than for Macedonia.

And things turned out just like my grandfather predicted:
“Sometimes you need to learn to be quiet... time will tell all”.

We saw that, after a century of silence, the strangers had inflicted so much pain and suffering on us that even a century was not enough time for us to forget everything and to heal from it.

As we have shown in this book, the Greeks have been meddling in our fate for a long time. This we have failed to understand and thus we continue to succumb to their will.

About what happened in Kostur Region, in the land of heroes and tombs, the story of the “Fratricidal Cemetery” has revealed deep secrets of brother fighting against brother, a drama of the destruction of the Macedonian seed. This story was written in order to record the atrocities committed and the many victims left behind. This story is for those Macedonians who are not aware of what happened to their ancestors.

The “Fratricidal Cemetery” is a new factual novel, written in order to deal with our past and with our ancestors. This is perhaps the right time to deal with it. There comes a special moment in life when a person finds the need to tell his or her story, good or bad, of his or her ancestors and what happened to them. A person has the need to set aside all misunderstandings, ideological differences, political biases... and tell the truth. Our record of our past is the legacy for our future. That which was important to remember must be written down, as a permanent record, so that it will not be forgotten. This was a time when a large part of the Macedonian nation experienced much death.

The stories told in this book are real and have been written to serve as historical facts obtained from original and numerous sources. They come from my personal experience, from military archival materials, from monographs and from other sources including studies conducted about the Kostur freedom fighting national movement and from the book: “Kazna bez vina” (Punishment without guilt).

And once again, as George Orwell once said: “History is always written by the victors!” and “Those who control the past, control the future! Those who control the present control the past!”

I returned to Kostur sixty five years after I was exiled in order to experience what it would be like to come back to my place of birth and to tell my story. I had some expectations, which I shared with you, including a picture of my experience from 1940 to 1949. And as I have said before, after visiting my house, the house where I was born, I felt like a stranger, like I did not belong there, that I don't belong to the ruins left behind. I stood by the ruins and tried to remember things, things that my grandfather had told me... a man who had fought in the Ilinden Uprising... whose grave I now could not find...

I am grateful for recently having the opportunity to hear the story of a true Macedonian freedom fighter, leader and patriot whose seed was destroyed. It was like I knew it; emotional, spiritual, serious, diverse... like the sad life story of a Kostur resident who lost everything including his inheritance... of belonging to the human race.

The man whose seed was destroyed, confirmed for me the reasons why the Greeks hated the Kostur freedom fighters so much. Like my grandfather used to say: “The happiest man is the man who makes everyone else happy.” The Greek occupier has proven that he wanted to make us Macedonians unhappy by turning us into wanderers of the world. The Greeks always wanted a Macedonia without Macedonians. And this we must never forget!

Krapov's view and judgment of key events that shook Kostur and the people of Kostur in the 20th century have exposed much of the Greek toughness and many of the details regarding the fate of our friends and enemies for the period from 1940 to 1949... and why we lost our native homes.

During the 20th century Kostur and Lerin Regions experienced a number of traumatic events which resulted in the Macedonian people losing their ancestral hearth and becoming world wanderers, alienated by their destiny.

We the people of Kostur spoke our Macedonian language for centuries, including the time when we were under Ottoman (Muslim) occupation. But the moment the Greeks appeared in Macedonia our language was banned, prohibited from being spoken... But we managed to safeguard it by speaking to our children in secret.

Smiling, Krapov said: “That’s the way it was... But we and our people made many mistakes... In place of tying ourselves to our lands, we chose to trust the ideological strongman who led us into oblivion!”

But we also saw that we were incapable of defending ourselves from the powerful. The CPY/CPM began to make a military dumping ground in Greek occupied Macedonia (see reports prepared by Yugoslav General Kapikjich) and the CPG converted Greek occupied Macedonia into a military training area, a military base was created exactly where we lived, where the majority of the Macedonian population lived.

Listening to the man with the destroyed seed telling me stories about Kostur and Macedonia, where I was born and grew up, made me think of the many other untold stories and the many secrets hidden here.

Is it possible that God is playing games with man? One moment he opens the door of happiness and the next he immediately slams it shut and locks it!

In the end I want to say: “We the victims who have experienced atrocities here have been silent for too long...”

The book “A century of silence (1913 - 2013)” has opened the theme of the fate of the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia and has left it open, not just for the Macedonian people but for all the people in the Balkans.

We from the older generation of Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia, who have survived the mass ethnic cleansings, have a

duty to document everything that we have experienced and leave it for our future generations...

From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank all my comrades and brothers from my native Kostur and Kostur Region who have been through hell and some who are still going through it and as Winston Churchill (1874 - 1965) once said: "As long as you are going through hell, keep going!"

One day: whatever was ours will be ours!

This is not the end, next comes part two when Kiratsa and Krsto Krapov's son, renamed from Doncho Krapov to Andonios Psaras, returned to Kostur to look for his roots and for the graves of his parents.

NOTES:

1. Andartes – members of the Greek armed illegal bands that fought in Macedonia against the Macedonians for Greece. They were especially active during the Ilinden Uprising and afterwards up until 51% of Macedonia's occupation by Greece.

2. Pavlos Melas (his real name was Mikis Zezas) was born in Messalina on March 29, 1870. He was originally from Epirus. For his exploits and the role he played in fighting against the Macedonian rebels, in 1904 he was appointed leader of the Greek struggle in western Macedonia with Kostur as its centre.

3. On October 25, 1903 Captain Kote, together with Vane Kizov from the village Gabresh and Pop Stavre from Psoderi, brought the severed head of Lazar Pop Traikov in a dirty bag to the Metropolitan of Kostur (Karavangelis) for which they were paid a large sum of Turkish gold coins (Lira). After this, Bishop Karavangelis, through Turkish officials, had the head attached to the door of the Kostur administration building where the head remained until the last days of October.

4. Ioannis Metaxas (1871 - 1940) was a Greek general and politician. He headed the Greek General Headquarters in 1915. He was a supporter of the Royalist movement since 1926. On August 4, 1936, as a Minister and President, he dissolved the Greek Parliament and introduced a monarchical dictatorship. He also imposed a ban on the Macedonian language.

5. In 1941, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt met on a boat in the Atlantic where, on August 14, 1941, they finalized and signed the famous "Atlantic Charter" whose principles were later adopted by the United Nations in its 1945 Declaration. Among other things, the Charter stated that all territorial changes must be in accordance with the expressed will of the free people. All nations have the right to choose a form of government for themselves. All rights must be returned to the people and warned them not to use force.

6. Two organizations were formed: SNOF for Kostur Region formed in October 1943 in the village D'mbeni and SNOF (created by EAM with the intent of destroying the Kostur Macedonian rebels and freedom fighters. This organization was strictly controlled by EAM and ELAS) in Lerin Region formed in November 1943 in the village Belkamen. Efforts to organization SNOF as an organization for all Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia and requests to organize them to act independently, i.e. outside of EAM, were supported by the CPG. The reader should also be aware of the fact that in January 1944, the CPG allowed the formation of a "Slavo-Macedonian" People's Liberation Army (SNOV), a military wing, under the direct leadership of EAM and ELAS

7. Tsvetko Uzunovski - Abas was responsible for OZNA (military police). Following his instructions during the CPM Central Committee Plenum, held in the summer months in 1945, the CPM proposed to take a frontal stance against a group of people that broke off from the Party. Included in this group were: Chento, Venko Markovski, Apostolski, Kiro Gligorov, Lazar Sokolov, Peter Piruze, Blagoi Hadzhi Panzov, all assisted by Dimitar Vlahov.

8. "Dulo" (Cave). This particular cave was a steep, underground hole extending very deep inside Mount Mali-Madi. It was known as "Duloto" in D'mbeni Region.

9. The Greek organization PAO (Pan-Hellenic Liberation Organization) consisted mainly of former police chiefs, Greek Army officers (EC) and other various anti-Peoples nationalist elements. PAO, in cooperation with the Greek authorities, tried to infiltrate the military ranks of ELAS with its agents and officers who were tasked to liquidate Partisans belonging to ELAS and communists. Included among the PAO officers that infiltrated ELAS were Kirtsidakis, Zisis and Mandaropoulos. These three were caught, convicted and physically liquidated in late April 1943.

Vassilis Bardzhiotas, high ranking member in the CPG and Political Commissar of DAG. "Struggle of the Democratic Army of Greece", p. 128.

10. MY NOTE: The CPG and the DPV kept their word in front of the world and, after the war, fought to bring back the children but only those deemed “Greeks by genus”. Half a century has passed since the children were taken away and their parents are still lamenting over them. Why didn’t the CPG take care to bring back the Macedonian children? Did it forget the sacrifices that the many thousands of Macedonians made when we gave it our support? Did it forget how many mothers and fathers of those children left their bones in Vicho and Gramos when they were fighting for CPG interests??!

11. The Partisan newspaper (DAG) “Eksormisi” was published every fifteen days. It was edited and printed on Mount Gramos.

12. On June 16, 1949 the AFZH Executive Board of Macedonian Women in Greek occupied Macedonia adopted a resolution to induct Macedonian women for the purpose of fighting in the front line in defense of Vicho.

13. “Those who control the past, control the future! Those who control the present control the past!” George Orwell: 1984.