

*Macedonians in Greece*  
1939 – 1949



By  
**Risto Stefov**

# Macedonians in Greece

1939 - 1949

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## PREFACE

Very little has been written about the Macedonians in Greece and their involvement in World War II and in the Greek Civil War. Macedonians who live in Greece to this day are afraid to speak of their terrible ordeals for fear of repercussions from the Greek authorities or because it is simply too painful for them to remember. To this day it is taboo in Greece to speak of the Greek Civil War.

The Macedonians in Greece it seems have been ignored by all sides. Yugoslavia has ignored them because it did not want to ruin its good relations with Greece. Greece on the other hand, to this day claims that Macedonians simply do not exist and wants no part of them. Bulgaria, even though it has a large Macedonian immigrant population from Greece, has yet to recognize the Macedonian people as a distinct ethnic group. So in reality no one really cares about the Macedonians in Greece and as a result very little to nothing has been written about them. "Indeed, the Macedonians in Greece are hardly ever mentioned in scholarly literature and have been virtually forgotten as a people and as a national minority." (Andrew Rossos)

This is most unfortunate not only because the Macedonian contribution to the struggle against Fascism and Nazism has been completely omitted, but because the Macedonian people themselves living in Greece despite their contributions, have been completely ignored as if they didn't exist.

In the chapters that follow we will make an attempt to tell the Macedonian story as it unfolded from a Macedonian point of view.

The story begins with an overview of events starting with Macedonia's invasion, occupation and partition by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria in 1912, 1913 to events leading up to the start of World War II.

A more detailed approach will then be taken to explain the Macedonian involvement in World War II and in the Greek Civil War.

This is not a story about battles fought and strategies applied but rather a story about the human factor and about struggles for equality and human rights. It is a story that will reveal, perhaps for the first time to English speakers, how the Macedonians in Greece were treated by Greek authorities and by the Great Powers during the war years from 1939 to 1949.

Greece has accused the Macedonian people living in Greece of being autonomists, separatists, communists and even of being foreign agents. But as we will see, none of these accusations are true; the only things Macedonians are guilty of are struggling for equality and human rights.

In spite of all assurances made by the Macedonian leadership during World War II and during the Greek Civil War that it had no intention of

leading an autonomist or separatist movement, the Greek leadership always remained suspicious and used every opportunity to stifle the Macedonian struggle.

All through the war years the Greek leadership was divided into two dominant factions; the Democrats leaning to the left and the Royalists and Republicans leaning to the right. Even though there were many political parties in Greece, each tended to lean to the left or to the right. So, to avoid confusion and for the sake of simplicity in telling this story, we will assume that there were only two sides; the Right and the Left. While the Left was lead by the Communist Party of Greece (CPG), a significant player in World War II and in the Greek Civil War, the Right was lead by a number and variation of parties to which, for the purpose of this write-up, we will refer to as the Royalists and Republicans.

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## Introduction

After Greece's occupation by Germany, Italy and Bulgaria, the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) was the first organization to successfully organize a resistance movement against the occupiers. The Macedonian people joined this movement because historically the CPG, at least in theory, supported the idea of equality and human rights for the Macedonian people. But as it turned out, this support was only a ploy to get the Macedonian population involved in the struggle. "It (CPG) was the only political party in Greece to recognize the Macedonian national identity and to have a public policy on the Macedonian national question. Against considerable opposition, the Third Extraordinary Congress of the KKE (CPG), meeting from November 26 to December 3, 1924, endorsed the Comintern line: support for a united Macedonian state in a future Balkan communist federation. This position was in basic accord with the demands of Macedonian activists and patriots, but it was extremely unpopular among the Greeks. The inauguration of the Popular Front line by the Comintern gave the Greek Communist Party the opportunity to replace it. Its Sixth Congress, in December 1935, adopted a new policy supporting equality for all national minorities in Greece, including the Macedonian; this remained its official stand until early 1949." (Andrew Rossos)

Macedonia was invaded, occupied and partitioned into three parts in 1913 and a small part was later given to Albania. To avoid confusion as to which part of Macedonia we are referring, in the subsequent chapters we will use the following:

- To the part of Macedonia annexed by Greece, commonly known as "Aegean Macedonia", we will refer to as "Greek occupied Macedonia".
- To the part of Macedonia annexed by Serbia, commonly known as "Vardar Macedonia" we will refer to as the "Republic of Macedonia".
- To the part of Macedonia annexed by Bulgaria, commonly known as "Pirin Macedonia, we will refer to as "Bulgarian occupied Macedonia".
- To the part of Macedonia that was annexed by Albania, commonly known as "Mala Prespa" we will refer to as "Albanian occupied Macedonia".
- The word "Macedonia" used on its own will mean the entire geographic, historic ethnic region of Macedonia.

Also, to avoid confusion between the various National Liberation Fronts that sprung up during the occupation years in the states that occupied Macedonian territories, we will refer to as follows:

- To what is commonly known as the EAM (Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo) in Greek we will refer to by its English equivalent the “Greek National Liberation Front” or GNLF.
- To what is commonly known as NOF (Naroden Osloboditelen Front) in Macedonian we will refer to by its English equivalent the “Macedonian National Liberation Front (Greece)”, or MNLF(G) or simply as MNLF. This was the Macedonian organization in Greece formed by the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia.
- To what is commonly known as NOF (Naroden Osloboditelen Front) in Macedonian we will refer to as the “Macedonian National Liberation Front (Yugoslavia)” or MNLF(Y). This was the Macedonian organization in Yugoslavia formed by the Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia.

During the German, Italian and Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia, the CPG-GNLF had an armed organization or military wing called ELAS (Ellinikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos). This organization will be referred to as the “National Liberation Army of Greece” (NLAG).

During the Greek Civil War the CPG formed a different armed organization known as the DSE (Dimokratikos Stratos tis Elladas). This organization will be referred to as the “Democratic Army of Greece” (DAG).

As this write-up is intended for a wide audience, we chose to use acronyms based on the English name equivalents for easier understanding.

Since the Macedonian people are of one ethnic group and recognize themselves as one ethnic Macedonian identity regardless of where they live, the term “Macedonians” will refer to all Macedonian people worldwide. References like “Macedonians in Greece” or “Macedonians in Canada” will mean “ethnic Macedonians living in Greece” or “ethnic Macedonians living in Canada”.

It is also important to emphasize at this point that the Macedonians living in Canada, Australia, the USA and other places outside of Macedonia are Macedonian migrants who over the years immigrated to those places, whereas the Macedonian people living in Macedonia are indigenous to Macedonia and have lived in Macedonia for many millennia. The Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian and Albanian people, who now live in Macedonia, are colonists who immigrated to Macedonia or were placed there by their respective states over the years, mostly after Macedonia’s occupation in 1912.

We decided to use “Greek occupied Macedonia” and “Bulgarian occupied Macedonia” to refer to those regions in order to bring attention to the plight of the Macedonian people living there. Even though Macedonians are indigenous to Macedonia and feel they are its original landowners and caretakers, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania by act of war occupied, partitioned and annexed Macedonia for themselves in 1912,

1913. Besides losing their lands, these Macedonians, especially those living in Greece and Bulgaria, since then have been economically and culturally oppressed. They have been stripped of the right to call themselves Macedonian, practice their Macedonian culture and speak their Macedonian language. Since 1912 many have also been evicted from their homes, stripped from their lands, forcibly assimilated into foreign nations, tortured, jailed, murdered and denied their ethnic identity, language and culture simply because they are Macedonian. It is also evident that Macedonians have been denied economic opportunities like well paid jobs, positions of authority in government, positions in educational institutions, high positions in the military, etc. The reasons for this are obvious. By denying the Macedonians their ethnic identity Greece and Bulgaria can claim that Macedonians don't exist and if Macedonians don't exist there will be no claims laid to the lands they acquired illegally by war. Above that, both Bulgaria and Greece have adopted parts of the Macedonian heritage and thus have claimed parts of Macedonia's history as their own. To acknowledge the existence of a Macedonian identity would then mean admission of cultural theft. Therefore from a Macedonian point of view to call those regions of Macedonia "occupied" is more than justifiable.

Yet, in spite of all this, the Macedonian people in Greece fought against Fascism and Nazism in World War II in order to help preserve Greece. They did this because they wanted to live in peace as equals to the Greeks, a concept the Greek mind cannot accept to this day.

Be it in World War II or in the Greek Civil War, the Macedonian people, proportionally speaking, bore the brunt of the wars. The heaviest battles during the Greek Civil War including the decisive ones, took part in Western Greek occupied Macedonia in the area bordering Yugoslavia and Albania. Greek occupied Macedonia served as a base for the political and military operations of the "democratic movement" and as the headquarters of both the CPG and its military wing the DAG. Greek occupied Macedonia was also of strategic importance to the CPG because its allies Yugoslavia, Albania and Soviet Russia were located to the north and access to them could only be gained through the cooperation of the Macedonian people in Greece. "As one participant and close observer put it: '[They] were turned into military workshops for the DSE (DAG), where everyone, young and old, male and female, served the needs of the DSE (DAG).'" (Andrew Rossos)

Besides civilian cooperation, a proportionally large number of fighters had also joined the ranks of the left. "Reliable statistics do not exist, but Macedonians seem to have constituted only around a twentieth of the total population of about seven million. Their estimated representation in the DSE (DAG) ranged from more than a quarter in April 1947 to more than two-thirds in mid-1949. Risto Kirjazovski maintains that they numbered 5,250 out of 20,000 in April 1947; and Lieutenant Colonel Pando Vajnas

claimed that in January 1948 there were about 11,000 Macedonian partisans in the DSE (DAG). According to C. M. Woodhouse, ‘they numbered 11,000 out of 25,000 in 1948, but 14,000 out of less than 20,000 by mid-1949.’” (Andrew Rossos)

Even though there was a proportionally large Macedonian contribution to both World War II and to the Greek Civil War there is very little to none attributed to the Macedonian people and to their sacrifices.

Besides addressing the Macedonian contribution, in the chapters that follow, we will also address the violence and scare tactics the Greek State employed to counter the Macedonian struggle and the atrocities it committed in the process.

In doing research for this book we encountered the term “Slavo-Macedonians” used by authors, mostly by Greeks, to refer to ethnic Macedonians. The use of this term implies that there is more than one “variety” of Macedonian but outside of “Slavo-Macedonians” no “other type” of Macedonian was identified. So for the purpose of this write-up, as mentioned earlier, the term “Macedonians” will be used to refer to the ethnic Macedonians no matter where they live. Further, we consider the term “Slavo-Macedonian” to be derogatory to the Macedonian people who self-identify as “Macedonians”. The term “Slavo-Macedonians” is intentionally employed by Greek authors to isolate and segregate Macedonians making them feel inferior, like foreigners on their own ancestral lands. The development of the modern Macedonian nation is no different than the development of any other modern nation but we don’t see the same authors use terms like “Slavo-Greek”, “Slavo-Bulgarian”, “Slavo-Serbian”, “Slavo-Albanian”, etc., to refer to other ethnicities even though elements of what make up the modern Macedonian nation are present in the Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian and Albanian nations. Therefore we justifiably feel that the use of the term “Slavo-Macedonians” is intentional and unnecessary and we recommend that it not be used in any context to refer to ethnic Macedonians.

## **Macedonia's Annexation by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria**

When we speak of the Balkan Wars of 1912, 1913 we often speak of the invasion, occupation and partition of Macedonia with intent of liberating the region from the Ottoman occupier but we seldom speak of the aftermath; the subjugation and oppression of the Macedonian people.

Some may call it liberation but what took place after the Balkan wars the Macedonian people would call genocide and cultural obliteration.

The only thing Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria liberated during the Balkan Wars were Macedonian lands which they quickly occupied and annexed for themselves.

While the world was congratulating Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria for their good deeds of kicking the sick man (Ottomans) out of Macedonia, the Macedonian people were facing new horrors never before experienced.

After almost six centuries of Ottoman occupation the Macedonian people, instead of being liberated like their neighbours had promised, were now about to face new and more lethal ordeals more damaging than ever before.

After they failed to free themselves in 1903, the Macedonian people welcomed the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian armies as saviours when they invaded and attacked the Ottomans. The entire Macedonian population, including the armed rebels who fought in the 1903 uprising joined the frenzied fight to get rid of the Ottomans. The vast majority of Macedonians believed their neighbours' propaganda when they were told the armies were here to liberate them. Why shouldn't they have believed them? After all, they were all Christian brothers who had suffered immensely under Ottoman rule. The Macedonians were more than willing to lend a helping hand when Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria were being liberated. Now it was Macedonia's turn and it was only fair that their neighbours return the favour.

"Brothers:-your sufferings and your pains have touched the heart of your kindred. Moved by the sacred duty of fraternal compassion, they come to your aid to free you from the Turkish yoke. In return for their sacrifice they desire nothing but to reestablish peace and order in the land of our birth. Come to meet these brave knights of freedom therefore with triumphal crowns. Cover the way before their feet with flowers and glory. And be magnanimous to those who yesterday were your masters. As true Christians, give them not evil for evil. Long live liberty! Long live the brave army of liberation!" (George F. Kennan. "The Other Balkan Wars" A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 1993. Page 50).

Unfortunately there were very few people who saw the dangers of this invasion and their voices were drowned out in the chorus of the frenzy.

Many leading Macedonians, including Krste Misirkov, warned against such false hopes, but most Macedonians, fed up with their intolerable living conditions could not see the danger. Mesmerized by slick propaganda, they were more than ready to welcome their liberators.

“The notion that our Christian brothers are here to occupy us and turn us into Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians is so ridiculous that it is downright funny. If a horse can be turned into a donkey; or if a sheep can be turned into a goat then we will believe that a Macedonian can be turned into a Greek, a Serbian, or a Bulgarian” were the attitudes of the Macedonian masses as the foreign armies marched into Macedonia unabated.

Then as the so called “war of liberation” ended and the Ottomans were driven out, and the three wolves turned on each other for a bigger share of the carcass, it became apparent to most that what seemed ridiculous less than a year before was now turning into a living nightmare.

The Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians, it seems, had their own way of determining who was a friend and who was a foe after Macedonians were butchered for their alleged sympathies with the “other side” or because they were affiliated with the wrong Christian Orthodox Church.

“Praying to the same God by different tongues can change a man’s identity as much as words alone can change one’s own blood into someone else’s.” Well spoken words of wisdom but unfortunately rational thinking and common sense was not the motto of the invaders whose armies were poisoned to see Greeks, Serbians, or Bulgarians in the Macedonians and to massacre everything on sight that was alien to them.

The Greek soldiers in the territories of Macedonia which they occupied saw everyone who could not speak Greek or who was not affiliated with the Greek Patriarchic Christian Orthodox Church as the enemy, be it man, woman, or child of any age.

“The Servian soldier, like the Greek, was firmly persuaded that in Macedonia he would find compatriots, men who could speak his language and address him with *jivio* or *zito*. He found men speaking a language different from his, who cried *hourrah!* He misunderstood or did not understand at all. The theory he had learned from youth of the existence of a Servian Macedonia and a Greek Macedonia naturally suffered; but his patriotic conviction that Macedonia must become Greek or Servian, if not so already, remained unaffected. Doubtless Macedonia had been what he wanted it to become in those times of *Douchan the Strong* or the Byzantine Emperors. It was only agitators and propagandist Bulgarians who instilled into the population the idea of being Bulgarian. The agitators must be driven out of the country, and it would again become what it had always been, Servian or Greek. Accordingly they acted on this basis. Who were these agitators who had made the people forget the Greek and Servian tongues?

First, they were the priests; then the schoolmasters; lastly the revolutionary elements who, under the ancient regime, had formed an 'organization'; heads of bands and their members, peasants who had supplied them with money or food, -in a word the whole of the male population." (George F. Kennan. "The Other Balkan Wars" A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 1993. Page 50-51)

In other words, to a Greek, Bulgarian or Serbian soldier, if a person was not of their kind as he had been taught about back home, then this person was the enemy and in Macedonia, the entire Macedonian population was the enemy.

No sooner had the invading armies consolidated their hold on Macedonia, than they arrested and punished all Macedonians regarded as leaders and venerated as heroes by the population, while the dregs, the very men who caused much suffering, were raised to greatness.

Progressive disintegration of social and national life in Macedonia began with the entry of the occupying Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian armies and has not ceased to this day (in Greece and Bulgaria).

As attested by the 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry Commission and the lost mailbag of letters captured from the Greek soldiers from the nineteenth regiment of the Greek seventh division fighting in Macedonia, all three States, Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia committed atrocities against the Macedonian people during the 1912 and 1913 Balkan wars. However, for the purpose of this write-up, the focus of investigation will be on the Greeks about whom more detailed information can be found in the six part series at the following link:

<http://www.maknews.com/html/articles/stefov/stefov61.html>

When war broke out in the Balkans in 1912 and 1913, the Carnegie Endowment dispatched a commission on a fact finding mission. The mission consisted of seven prominent members from the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia. Among them was the distinguished journalist Henry N. Brailsford, author of the book "Macedonia its Races and their Future".

The commission was dispatched from Paris on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1913 shortly before the end of the second Balkan war and returned to Paris nearly eight weeks later, on September 28<sup>th</sup>. In spite of opposition from the Greek government, the commission arrived in time to witness much of the war's aftermath and record most accounts while they were still fresh in people's minds. The results drawn from this investigation were printed in Washington DC in 1914 under the title "Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Cause and the Conduct of the Balkan Wars". Unfortunately because of the flare-up of World War I, no action was taken and the report itself ended up being shelved.

Still in the midst of excitement, the first Balkan war was accepted by European opinion as a war of Liberation. In the European mind, its conclusion meant the downfall of the Ottoman regime in Europe and the end of all oppression. Unfortunately, European understanding of the Macedonian situation was far from reality as one tyrant was being replaced by three. While the Ottoman regime tolerated the various religions, languages and traditions of all races in their Empire, the new tyrants did not. As soon as they consolidated their hold on Macedonia, they began to act on its population.

First came the evictions and the first ones to be thrown out were the Muslim Macedonians. Even though they spoke the Macedonian language and insisted that they were Macedonians, not Turks, their captors relentlessly cast them out. For no reason other than being Muslim, they were evicted from their homes and forced out from their ancestral lands.

After the Turkish authorities vacated Macedonia, all that was left were civilians. No Turk dared remain behind knowing what awaited him. So the Turkish villages that the Carnegie report was referring to were in fact Macedonian villages inhabited by Muslim Macedonians.

When they were finished with the Turks, the Greek soldiers turned on the Macedonian civilian population and uncontrollably, with the blessing of the Greek State and the Greek King himself, pillaged, tortured, raped and murdered defenseless people. Atrocities committed against the civilian population in Macedonia, including the burning of villages, were simply cold acts of genocide perpetrated to eradicate the Macedonian population in order to make room for Greek colonization.

The Carnegie Relief Commission reported that in Macedonia alone 160 villages were razed leaving 16,000 homeless. Several thousand civilians had been murdered and over 100,000 were forced to emigrate as refugees. (Michael A. Radin. "IMRO and the Macedonian Question". Skopje: Kultura, 1993. Page 149).

Macedonian families known to attend the Exarchate Church were ordered by force to "take with them what they could carry and get out". "This is Greece now and there is no place for Bulgarians here." Those who remained were forced to swear loyalty to the Greek State. Anyone refusing to take the loyalty oath was either executed, as an example of what would happen to those disloyal, or evicted from the country. To explain the mass evacuations, Greek officials claimed that the inhabitants of Macedonia left by choice or became Greek by choice. The truth is no one was given any choice at all.

The triple occupation worsened living conditions in Macedonia but the fighting spirit of the Macedonian people continued to live underground and abroad. Three generations of fighting for liberty, freedom and an independent Macedonia came to a close. The Ilinden generation and the

Macedonian Revolutionary Organization were defeated, not by the Ottomans or Muslim oppression but by Christian cruelty and deception.

Soon after the occupation, underground societies sprang up everywhere urging the Macedonian people to refuse their new fate and oppose the partition. Accordingly, many Macedonians did so by refusing to obey the new officialdom and by not participating in the new institutions. This, however, did not stop the military regimes occupying Macedonia from exposing the population to systematic denationalization and violent assimilation.

Macedonians again saw hope after the Great War that maybe while a new world order was being created, the Great Powers would see to it to reverse the dreaded 1913 Treaty of Bucharest that divided their country, but those hopes too were dashed in 1919 at the Versailles conference when the Great Powers ratified the Treaty of Bucharest, making Macedonia's division permanent.

The end of the Great War brought peace to the world but not to the subjugated Macedonian population which, as was done in 1878 when Macedonia was given back to the Ottomans, was again done in 1919 when Macedonia and its people were given back to their tormentors the Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians.

One good thing for the Macedonians that came out of Versailles was Article 51, the League of Nations' code to "protect national minorities". Article 51 of the Treaty of Versailles espouses equality of civil rights, education, language and religion for all national minorities. Unfortunately, article 51 was never implemented by the Balkan States or enforced by the League of Nations which Greece and Bulgaria, to this day, violate and ignore. Why is this? Because to this day, Greece and Bulgaria claim that "the Macedonian identity" does not exist and has never existed.

Greece was immensely rewarded for its participation in the Great War. At the conclusion of the Treaty, Greece got back what it had previously annexed and, additionally, received a large portion of Epirus, western Thrace, Crete and the Aegean Islands. It is important to mention here that when Albania's affirmation for independence was signed, at the London Conference in February 1920, more of Macedonia's territory was partitioned. A narrow strip of land running through Lake Ohrid and southward along Macedonia's western boundary was awarded to Albania.

Soon after arriving victorious in Greece, the Greek Prime Minister Venizelos, in a speech in Solun, announced his plans for the creation of a "Greater Greece", the so called "Megali Idea" which was to bring together all the so called "Greek peoples" under a single Greater Greek State.

## **From a Majority to a Minority**

With the stroke of a pen, in 1919 at the Treaty of Versailles (Paris), England and France sealed Macedonia's fate by ratifying the principles of the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest and officially endorsed Macedonia's partition. This gave Greece the signal to pursue forced expulsion and denationalization of Macedonians and to begin a mass colonization by transplanting "potential Greeks" into the occupied territories of Macedonia. The Neuilly Treaty signed between Bulgaria and the Allied powers allowed for forced exchanges of populations. Greece as a partner of the victorious allies was able to impose on defeated Bulgaria a condition in the Treaty allowing for an exchange of populations between the two states. Greece took the opportunity to unload Macedonians in a seemingly legal manner.

Subsequently 66,180 Macedonians largely from Eastern Greek occupied Macedonia but also from the districts of Kukush, Enidzhe Vardar and Solun were forced to leave for Bulgaria but were not permitted to settle among the Macedonians in Bulgarian occupied Macedonia. Bulgaria on the other hand, sent 22,800 so called "Greeks" which the Greek government settled in Greek occupied Macedonia.

After returning from France, one of Venizelos's objectives was to promote the "Megaly Idea" of a Greater Greece where all so called "historic Greeks" could be united. His first step was to convince the world that the Christians living in Asia Minor were actually Greek and needed Greece's protection.

Under the protection of allied warships, on May 15, 1919, Greek troops began their landing in Smyrna. But instead of staying put and protect the Christians as per prior agreements, they began to occupy western Asia Minor. Then in March 1921 the Greek government ordered a full-scale offensive against the Turks. "Once again Greece had failed to learn the lesson that in large matters she was impotent without the support of the great powers or at least of one of them, and even Britain was lukewarm to this Anatolian venture." (Kenneth Young. "The Greek Passion". London: J.M. Dent & Sons LTD. 1969. Page 193)

Unable to continue the offensive without great power assistance, by early autumn the Greeks were pushed back beyond the halfway point between Smyrna and Ankara, reaching an uneasy military stalemate with the Turks. Realizing that they couldn't possibly win militarily or politically, the Greeks turned to the Paris Conference of March 1922 looking for a compromise. The compromise called for the withdrawal of the Greek armies and for placing the Christian population under the protection of the League of Nations. Sensing a victory, Turkey insisted on an unconditional evacuation of the Greek forces, a demand unacceptable to the Greeks. Still counting on British help, in July 1922 the Greeks

unsuccessfully attempted to get permission from their allies to enter Constantinople.

Turkey launched a full-scale offensive on August 26, 1922 and forced the Greeks into a hasty retreat back to Smyrna. On September 8 the Greek army was evacuated and the next day the Turkish army invaded Smyrna. On the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> outbreaks of killing and looting began, followed by a massacre of the Christian population in which 30,000 Christians, mostly Armenians, perished. As a result of the violence 250,000 people fled to the waterfront to escape the catastrophic disaster.

The Asia Minor campaign was over along with the "Megali Idea" of a Greater Greece. Worse yet, as a result of this catastrophic Greek fiasco, over one million Turkish Christians were displaced, most of them into Macedonia. Their settlement affected the demography of the Macedonian landscape as well as the morale of the Macedonian population.

By the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, the Greco-Turkish war came to an end. Greece and Turkey signed a population exchange agreement using "religion as the basic criterion for nationality." (Richard Clogg. "A Short History of Modern Greece". Page 120)

The November 1925 issue of National Geographic Magazine best illustrates the magnitude of the human wave, the audacity of the Greek and Turkish authorities and the total disregard for human life. "History's Greatest Trek, Tragedy Stalks the Near East as Greece and Turkey Exchange Two Million of their People. ...1922 began in what may fairly be called history's greatest, most spectacular trek-the compulsory intermigration of two million Christians and Muslims across the Aegean Sea." "...the initial episodes of the exchange drama were enacted to the accompaniment of the boom of cannon and the rattle of machine gun and with the settings pointed by the flames of the Smyrna holocaust." (Melville Chater, National Geographic, November 1925. Page 533)

"Stroke of the Pen Exiles 3,000,000 People. It is safe to say that history does not contain a more extraordinary document. Never before in the world's long pageant of folk-wanderings have 2,000,000 people-and certainly no less than 3,000,000 if the retroactive clause is possible of complete application-been exiled and re-adopted by the stroke of the pen" (National Geographic, November 1925. Page 569)

"Even if regarded as a voluntary trek instead of a compulsory exchange, the movement would be without parallel in the history of emigration." "One might just add that history has never produced a document more difficult of execution. It was to lessen these difficulties that exchangeability was based in religion and not race. Due to five centuries of Turkish domination in Greece, the complexities in determining an individual's racial status are often such as would make a census taker weep." (National Geographic, November 1925. Page 570)

"Greece with one-fifth Turkey's area has 1,500,000 more people. Turkey with a population of 5,000,000 and naturally rich territory contains only 15 people to the square mile...Greece, with less than one fifth of Turkey's area, emerges with a population exceeding the latter's for the first time by 1,500,000 people averaging 123 to the square mile." (National Geographic, November 1925. Page 584)

"History's Greatest Trek has cost 300,000 lives. Conservative estimates place it at 300,000 lives lost by disease and exposure." (National Geographic, November 1925. Page 584)

"The actual exchange was weighted very heavily in Turkey's favour, for some 380,000 Muslims were exchanged for something like 1,100,000 Christians."

"The total population in Greece rose between 1907 and 1928 from 2,600,000 to 6,200,000." "After the Greek advances of 1912, for instance, the Greek elements in Greek Macedonia had constituted 43 percent of the population. By 1926, with the resettlement of the refugees, the Greek element has risen to 89 percent." (Richard Clogg. "A Short History of Modern Greece". Page 121)

After all this, surprisingly (and shamefully) Greece still claims that its population is homogeneous; direct descendants of the peoples of the ancient City States.

"If Greece exists today as a homogeneous ethnos, she owes this to [the Asia Minor Catastrophe]. If the hundreds of thousands of refugees had not come to Greece, Greek Macedonia would not exist today. The refugees created the national homogeneity of our country. (Antonios Kandiotis, Metropolitan of Florina, in Anastasia Karakasidou's book "Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood". Page 141)

According to Karakasidou, almost half of the refugees were settled in urban centers and rural areas in Macedonia. "Searching for locations in which to settle this mass of humanity, the Greek government looked north to the newly incorporated land in Macedonia..." "...by 1930, 90 percent of the 578,844 refugees settled in rural Greece were concentrated in the regions of Macedonia and western Thrace. Thus Macedonia, Greece's newly acquired second 'breadbasket' (after Thessaly), became the depository for East Thracian, Pontic, and Asia Minor refugees." (Anastasia Karakasidou. "Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood". Page 145)

By the 1923 Lausanne Agreement Greece expelled 394,108 Turkish Moslems to Turkey. Included in this number were more than 40,000 Moslem Macedonians. Turkey on the other hand transferred 1,221,849 Christian refugees to Greece of which 538,595 were settled in Greek occupied Macedonia.

When we speak of "confiscated Macedonian lands" by the Greek state we often speak of the lands of those Macedonians who were killed, evicted or fled their homeland but rarely do we speak of the land confiscations due

to the Land Redistribution Program that the Greek state introduced in 1928-1929 in Greek occupied Macedonia.

Faced with a huge influx of settlers during the early 1920's Greece was running out of space and as Karakasidou rightly pointed out, a large number of these settlers were concentrated in Macedonia. In addition to taking the vacant lands of those Macedonians who had been driven out, the Greek state used the Land Redistribution Program to also take the lands of those Macedonians who were still living in Greek occupied Macedonia. Families suffered land expropriations despite their claims to legal titles of ownership.

Even before the Land Redistribution Program was put into place, many Macedonian families were experiencing economic hardships and male family members were forced to seek work outside of their communities as far away as Canada, the USA and Australia.

The following is an excerpt from the book "Children of the Bird Goddess" by Kita Sapurma & Pandora Petrovska which eloquently illustrates the Macedonian peoples' plight both at home and abroad.

"Pechalba [migrant work] was definitely not for the weak at heart. It was the ultimate test for the Macedonian man. These are the unsung heroes, without whose toil this great country [Australia] would not have prospered so. They gave their youth, their energy, bloodied sweat and lives in the development of Australia's fledgling heavy industries and pastoral wealth, only to be called 'dagos' and treated like second class citizens by the Anglo- Australians who had little tolerance for these newcomers.

The work in the bush camp ground to a halt and my father had to find other forms of employment, however by now this was the time of increasing depression in Australia and work was not always so easy to come by. Even though work in the bush camps was very hard, the workers were paid a mere pittance and it was so difficult to save enough to pay for one's fare back home, much less save enough to send to family back home. The 1920s were a period of economic growth for Australia with incentives for immigration. The Wall Street crash in 1929 and the Great Depression had its effect in Australia with the basic wage being more severely cut.

At one stage Spase managed to find some work on a sheep station where he did all sorts of manual labour including making fences and handling the sheep. The boss was a cruel man who treated his workers, particularly the Aborigines, with contempt. My father used to recount the time when he was verbally abused and forbidden to even fill his billy with water from the garden tap. And he would say that you would not even contemplate knocking on the back door, much less entering the homestead. He was abused by the boss and told to get water from the sheep's trough, as that water was good enough. This reflected the horrendous attitude towards the newcomers who were considered to be little better than animals. Spase used to say that the boss' dog lived better than he did. 'I

wish I was born a dog in Australia, like Rusty. He ate more meat than I did and was certainly treated a lot better.’ This was the way they treated itinerant ‘dago’ workers like Spase, which was nothing compared to the treatment received by the indigenous people whose land they possessed.

After unsuccessfully searching for work, Spase decided to become a fruit vendor. He bought a basket and some oranges and began selling them from house to house in Perth, in order to survive. By now he had managed to pick up some English. When he had a good day selling, he could afford to buy himself a loaf of bread and milk for a meal, on a poor day with few sales he would eat his oranges for breakfast, lunch and dinner and think about the smell of the cooked meat given to Rusty.

After this unsuccessful venture he went into business with a friend from Rakovo from the Panovski clan. This man had enough money to open a small fish and chips shop, but because of the depression their venture was not successful. At the same time the banks crashed and many wealthy people went broke. This is why Spase's advice to us and our children was to be wary of debt, because he had known only too well what Australia was like in economic crisis. There were no unemployment benefits and welfare services for immigrants or workers. The lower echelons of society were very much on their own in terms of day to day survival. He would speak vividly of the soup kitchens and the lines of destitute people queuing for their daily meal. Because of the very bad economic situation, it was clear that Spase could not make a living much less a fortune and his father sent him money to pay for his fare back to [Greek occupied] Macedonia.

This was a very demoralizing situation as it was shameful for a man to return home without any money. This is why some pechalbari failed to return home even after ten, fifteen or even twenty years. It took them such a long time to save any real amount of money because of their very small wages. It was thought to be proof of their laziness or ineptitude as a provider or ‘domakin’. As a man of integrity and a very hard worker, this shame was very difficult for Spase to bear, but upon returning to the village, when he learnt that all their property had been confiscated by the Greek government and reallocated to incoming refugees, this was a doubled edged grief that was almost intolerable for Spase.

Upon his return, he found all the women about the house. Nobody was out in the fields. This he found to be quite strange, especially in the middle of summer when there were any number of jobs that needed to be done in the fields. But when his mother could no longer evade his questions and told him that the family no longer had any land, he screamed in a furious rage, asking them why they had not told him as it would have been better for him to stay in Australia. One would have to wonder why it would have been better to stay in depression ridden Australia, eating oranges and drinking water from sheep troughs, rather than coming home. Could this

have been more appealing or tolerable for Spase than a life as a dispossessed landholder and second class citizen in his own land? It is difficult to understand the effect of the repressive environment on the men. Their inability to provide for their families as they watched helplessly whilst strangers worked their land was absolutely intolerable for them.

The dispossession left its mark on all of us especially as the men folk became increasingly angry and frustrated. Because they did not wail, their grief for the land did not become fossilized in the folklore. Rather they tried to lose themselves in another world created with the help of the strong spirit drink, 'rakija'. The only way to appease their own inner turmoil and sense of failure was to leave. This is what my father did.

When my father left [again for Australia] in 1936, my grandmother asked him to complete the ritual for a safe journey and safe return as he was leaving. This entailed knocking over an earthen pot of water at the threshold of the house. This signified an easy journey and easy trip. My grandmother asked him to knock over the water and he refused, saying 'When that rock is able to roll uphill, that is when I will return to this land.' My grandmother was devastated by this reaction and took this event as a premonition that her son would not return to this threshold again, which was correct. My father and mother spent a further ten years apart. My father doing an assortment of labouring jobs in Australia and my mother trying to raise a family by herself.

I don't fully understand why my father insisted on coming to Australia the second time. Life was difficult but it was more than that. The dispossession of land affected the men folk in a different way. The untold devastation as they would walk past their fields being worked by others took its toll in the form of blind anger and sheer frustration which was often then vented on the womenfolk. My grandfather became a recluse away from the village and my father left. Family life was changed forever. They were no longer proud landholders and their standing in the village as well as standard of living fell. They could no longer farm their land and feed their families from the produce, rather they had to do jobs for others as well as shepherding, which was considered the lowliest job. By going on work migration my father thought he could salvage his self esteem and bring better life chances for his family." (Kita Sapurma & Pandora Petrovska. "Children of the Bird Goddess". Pollitecon Publications. 1997. Pages 67-69 and 74-75)

The following segment was taken from John S. Koliopoulos's book "Plundered Loyalties" and represents the Greek point of view on the situation.

"In Eordaea, where large numbers of refugees had been settled in the houses and lands abandoned by the Muslims, officials struggled to squeeze out more land, especially in or around Slav-speaking villages like Emporion and Komanos. In the village of Karyochori in the same district

more than 200 families were given the land which had previously sustained less than half that number of Muslim families. About 3.25 hectares for each family were allotted, of which only one-third was fertile; or so they maintained ten years later, when 122 inhabitants petitioned the authorities to resettle them elsewhere, preferably in the plain of Central Macedonia. It should finally be mentioned that ever since 1913 a steady trickle of Christian families from the newly-founded independent Albanian state settled mostly in villages in the districts of Kastoria and Kozani and, almost as a rule, with relatives. This kind of settlement went on more or less unnoticed by the authorities, but by contrast everyone appeared to take an interest in the refugees from European and Asiatic Turkey, who became an instrument of national policy. The opposite would have been surprising. A few hundred Anatolian refugee families were even settled in the brigand preserve of Servia to strengthen communities against the swift-footed and predatory pastoralists of Mt Chassia. Above all, refugees were sent north to settle around and amidst Slav Macedonians in the hope that such settlement would facilitate their 'Hellenisation', in speech no less than in sentiment.

However, the need to unburden the country's port cities of several hundred thousand destitute refugees as quickly as possible did not allow time to send north 'suitable' refugees or take proper account of the capacity of the receiving places to secure a tolerable existence for the newcomers. Thus almost half the refugees settled in the district of Florina spoke Turkish and little or no Greek. Many Pontians spoke Turkish, and the Caucasians spoke a form of Greek unintelligible to most Greek-speakers, let alone to the Slav Macedonians whom the refugees were expected to Hellenize in speech. Hordes of destitute humanity went north determined to take root in lands claimed or already occupied by the indigenous peasants. The newcomers brought with them, along with the determination of the survivors of a great disaster, the support of the authorities who were eager to secure the contested region in the way their counterparts across the border were trying to secure their own lands, namely by strengthening the dominant linguistic and cultural element of the national state against all other groups. The influx of refugees in villages where the available land was insufficient to satisfy their needs created unbearable pressures on the Slav Macedonians to leave their homes for less inhospitable lands than those they were obliged to share with newcomers whom they despised. Those who chose to remain did so for all the reasons why peasants everywhere have always chosen to live next to unwelcome newcomers and under unfriendly rulers.

As a result of this type of settlement, old cleavages and conflicts, dating from the Greek-Bulgarian conflict at the beginning of the century, already described, were intensified, especially in mixed villages and towns. One reason for the intensification of conflict concerned land.

Indigenous peasants, Greek- and Slav-speaking, resented the distribution of Muslim and communal land to the refugees. Cultural differences between these people and the refugees kept the two communities further apart. And administrators from southern Greece, bearers of an ideology and policy aiming to obliterate linguistic traces other than Greek, put Slav Macedonians at a disadvantage compared to other Greeks and turned the existing gap into a dangerous chasm.

Many villages, particularly mixed ones, quarreled over disputed land, and were torn apart and bled white as the result of costly lawsuits. It took more than ten years to draw village boundaries on pastureland, while many disputes over arable land were settled only after the Second World War. Officials of the Commission for the Settlement of Refugees, who were themselves refugees or associated with refugee interests, were expected to favour the newcomers in their disputes with the indigenous peasants over lands.” (John S. Koliopoulos. “Plundered Loyalties”. Pages 42-43)

Besides colonizing Macedonia with foreign refugees and usurping Macedonian lands the Greek state in the 1920’s also initiated a Hellenization program to turn Macedonians into Greeks.

## **Hellenizing Greek occupied Macedonia**

Hellenization of the Macedonian people began way before Macedonia's invasion, occupation and partition by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. It began with the introduction of the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian Churches in Macedonia.

When in 1878 Macedonia was given back to the Ottomans by the Western Powers, its status became "undetermined" with implications that Macedonian territories were now up for grabs.

There were no Greeks, Serbians or Bulgarians living in Macedonia prior to the introduction of the foreign Churches there because these nations never existed before. Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria are 19<sup>th</sup> century artificially created nation-states, created from the same ethnic Christian composition but each nation was artificially designed to support the aims of the Great Power which created it.

Using the same principles of artificiality with which they themselves were created, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria through their respective churches began to spread propaganda in an attempt to convince the Macedonian population that only Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians existed in Macedonia. Their aims were designed not only to convince Macedonians but also to convince the outside world and pave the way for Macedonia's occupation.

The population exchanges that subsequently followed were nothing more than expelling those people who the three states felt would be a threat to their objectives.

Macedonians were not Greek, Serbian or Bulgarian that is why these states, particularly Greece, had to apply extreme measures to suppress them.

Soon after the Greek government established rule in Greek occupied Macedonia it opened Greek language schools to teach the entire Macedonian population to speak Greek. While children attended regular school, adults were expected to attend night school.

Besides Hellenizing the Macedonian population by teaching it to speak Greek, the Greek state also took measures to eliminate everything that was Macedonian.

By law promulgated on November 21, 1926, all place names (toponymia) in Greek occupied Macedonia were Hellenized. All Macedonian names of cities, towns, villages, rivers, lakes, mountains, etc., were changed to Greek ones. In a similar manner, Macedonian families were forced to change their Macedonian last names to Greek ones. Even individual given names were changed forcing alien names upon the Macedonian population. Since then to this day families lost continuity with their relatives especially those who had fled Greece before Hellenization policies were put in place.

For those who don't know what "Hellenization" is, it is a process of assimilating people from various ethnic groups such as Macedonians, Vlachs, Albanians, Turks, etc., and turning them into Greeks. To an outsider this may seem strange and even comical but to Macedonians who were born in Greek occupied Macedonia and who had lived through this process, it was a living nightmare.

Many Macedonians have relatives; brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts, etc., who have been Hellenized by Greek propaganda and today are the staunchest Greeks. The so called Greeks who are indigenous to Greek occupied Macedonia are no more than an artificial construct of Greek propaganda. They say they are Greek because since the occupation of Greek occupied Macedonia the Greek educational system has been telling them that they are Greeks and punishing them for feeling Macedonian.

What follows is a true story exactly as told by Peter Minas who attended Greek school in 1950, the only schooling available to Macedonians:

"A Young Boy that was I no more than 10 years old, playing with friends in the neighbourhood yard, not aware that we had been watched by none other than the teacher of our class.

Unaware of the political situation, feeling joy in my heart I called out to my friend Done in my native Macedonian tongue to, 'Come and play with us'.

Next morning in class, I hear the loud voice of my teacher asking to know 'Who is the one who still speaks in his native tongue?'

All around fear I see, I'm told to get up and stand in front of the class. I find the courage to rise up. 'You are a traitor, he said to me. 'You don't belong here. Take your books and go. Bulgaria is the place for you.'

He takes me by my arms throws me on the floor, attacking me with his feet and the long stick that he holds.

I look up with tears streaming down my face and with courage that I had never felt before I say in a choking voice "Teacher I don't know what traitor means I haven't done anything Wrong. That's the language we speak at home.'

I'm humiliated; my knees are weak. O Lord why is this happening to me. I want to go home and hide from the world. In the days and months that follow I am isolated by all.

They are told not to play with me or else... I am so alone.

I could not have known then that the Greeks would use such tactics on old and young to achieve their goal. First they destroy your soul then take away your identity. That black autumn day in 1950 I was not alone Our Lord Jesus Christ was there. He raised me up and restored my soul.

I have been living in this wonderful country that is called Canada for the last 55 years. I had a successful career; I have a loving family and many close relatives and friends." (Peter Minas).

Here is another story from a young girl who was punished by her teacher for being Macedonian:

“My first visit to school did not last very long. No sooner had I been shown to my classroom, I was greeted by my teacher, who instead of showing me to my place proceeded to sarcastically ridicule me in front of the other students. I did not understand all that he was saying, but his problem was the fact that I was wearing traditional Macedonian clothes, those my mother had made for me, instead of the correct school uniform. He grabbed my braided hair with the ribbons and coins, whilst facing me, pulling my head backwards. I winced. The venom in his words stung as much as my hair which felt as if it was being ripped out by the roots.

‘How dare you come dressed in these rags and get that rubbish out of your hair! You need a blue and white tunic and blue and white ribbons,’ explained the other children who translated for me. ‘Go home and change, I never want to see you dressed in village rags like this again!’

I remember stumbling out of the school grounds, tears streaming down my cheeks; by the time I ran home, I was sobbing incessantly and hyperventilating. My grandmother took fright when she saw me and grabbed me wanting to know what had happened. My mother came running out of the house when she heard my grandmother's commotion and became distressed herself when I could not stop sobbing long enough to tell them what my first five minutes of school had been like. At that moment I wanted my father to be home, more than anything else. I knew that had he been there he would have dealt with the teacher in no uncertain terms, as only a father could handle the situation.

They made me sit down and gave me a spoon full of sugar to settle me down and finally I could get the words out. I told them that my finest clothes were not good enough to wear to school, the teacher called them rags and my traditionally braided hair with red ribbons and coins was inappropriate for school also. I needed to wear the colours of Greece. When I had finally explained what had happened, I thought my grandmother would explode, she began cursing incessantly that the teacher and the Greek regime be struck down with a paralytic disease, that they burn in the devil's own domain, that pestilence and disaster mark their day and so forth.

Once she had regained her composure the question ‘Where am I going to find you a blue and white tunic?’ arose. I could hear my mother and grandmother talking and yelling and cursing as they rummaged through the chests and cupboards where they kept cloth and garments. They managed to find part of an old dress and put it over my finest clothes and I was forced, practically pulling and screaming back to school, though I never wanted to return. The old raggy dress over my clothes was a signal to the teacher that my grandmother and mother believed that the raggiest dress was good enough for their school uniform. When my grandfather and

uncle returned home, they were furious and in no uncertain terms had their bit to say to the 'educators'.

To say that I hated school would be an understatement, not because I hated learning, on the contrary, I was intelligent and wanted to achieve. The fact that today I have four university educated daughters is indicative of that intelligence. But I hated the way the teachers made me feel.

Early on in the process, my first five minutes at school taught me that my mother's and grandmother's handiwork, culture and traditions were worthless, and inherent in that negative reinforcement was a feeling of my own worthlessness.

I suppose it wasn't until I went to school that I realized that the Greek language was the language of the colonizing power. Even though Macedonian was spoken in the village, at home and with relatives, the necessary form of communication at school and church was Greek. We spoke it with a thick accent because we were Macedonian bilinguals. We were taught that our Macedonian language was inconsequential, that it had no name, alphabet and could not be taught. That it was not a language of 'high' communication, that is, one could not stand up and present a lecture or a speech in Macedonian because it was just a nothing or mongrel language with no structure or words, just remnants of the languages of the passing warlords.

It wasn't until I was in Australia that I realized that this was totally incorrect. I learned that there was an education system, literature and newspapers. I attended meetings, concerts and church services and spoke with educated relatives from the Republic of Macedonia. My father learned the script in the intoxicating eucalyptus bush of Western Australia to the sounds of the lonely rain birds' song and many years later taught my husband. My children became literate in Macedonian in Australia, completing University qualifications in the language. There is a certain bitter irony that it was in Australia that I too, at the age of sixty, became literate in my grandmother's language. And the lies I had been taught, and the worthlessness I had felt, dissipated with the empowerment that comes with mother tongue literacy, especially for those who have been forced to live a lie during their childhood.

It was not enough that we were stripped of our land, but they tried to take our dignity as people. We were taught we did not exist, that there were no Macedonian people and if they really wanted to denigrate us they would call us Gypsies or Bulgaros, because they hated these peoples almost as much as they hated Macedonians. We were second class citizens in our own homeland and because we clearly did not have a Hellenic background, ensuring that we acquired one via the education system meant imbuing students with a feeling of self-hated towards their own background. Our humiliation continued as in the course of the lessons the teacher made sure that the negative reinforcement was given to the

Macedonian children. I remember knowing the answers to questions and putting up my hand constantly, only to be told to sit down and shut up. I was never praised for knowing anything. It would not do to develop the intelligence and self-confidence of a Macedonian child, she might one day work out what was really going on, and have the strength of character to oppose it! All this had the effect of making me become quite disinterested in school. This and the persecution for speaking Macedonian.

I've neglected to say that at school speaking Macedonian was absolutely forbidden, but my friends and I ignored this and in the play ground would use the language that rolled naturally off our tongues. One day as we were playing "pupana", a game like knuckles, with my friend Vasilka, I caught a glimpse of the teacher talking to an older prosvigi [Pontic settler] student. Almost instantly, the boy came over to where we were playing and started to belt us, me in particular because I was by far the most vocal and rebellious. The teacher watched on as the boy boxed me about the head and ears, so hard that I became dizzy and had to sit down. We begged him to stop; when he finished he raised his head towards the teacher. I gathered this was punishment for breaking the rule and speaking Macedonian.

When I went home, whimpering and sobbing yet again, as was a seemingly regular occurrence, my grandmother would lose her electric temper and toss all the Greek text books in the fire. Her words still ring in my head 'Its not enough, they have taken our land, but now to mistreat our young, to take our language, this is too much!' She would curse and yell and I understand where the rebellious streak in me came from. This served to neutralize the effect of the Greek schooling process, as she reinforced our self-worth by rejecting any system that denigrated us for being ourselves. To be dispossessed in one's own land poses all types of problems. It became all too obvious to my grandmother that our dispossession would not be only of the materially visible things. As well as the land, our language and culture could also be confiscated, leaving us with nothing but an empty shell of the people we once were.

This was how the Greek national neurosis about the 'endopi' [indigenous] was incubated and perpetuated to oncoming generations. Intolerance for non- Hellenes was the stepping stone towards hatred for a people whose only fault was to live on land which now fell under Greek domination. This was how I learned first hand that my grandmother's words made sense 'Kaj shto ima sila nema pravina' -where there is power there is no justice. It seems that all songs sung and now words written are about challenging injustice of one form or another. Injustice provides the necessary ingredient for human tragedy.

I suppose one of the final insults to our family was a school performance which promoted the sense of 'mother Greece's' embracing power. The different traditional outfits of the prosvigi [Pontic settlers],

Macedonian and Vlach students were swapped. I was dressed in a Prosefi outfit and my Prosefi friend in a Macedonian outfit. This was so hard for my family to bear seeing their child dressed in the traditional dress of those who had been allocated our land, those who had fought with my father and uncle. And the teachers knew this. This was a deliberate act to rub salt in the old wounds and to assert their power. I will never forget the disgust in my grandfather's eyes the night of that concert. Thankfully, during the war years this type of schooling was interrupted.” (Kita Sapurma & Pandora Petrovska. “Children of the Bird Goddess”. Pollitecon Publications. 1997. Pages 84-88)

There is no Macedonian born in Greek occupied Macedonia that hasn't got a similar story or that has been spared from such a tragic experience.

News of the Greek acts promulgated on November 21, 1926 and the new, official Greek names were published in the Greek government daily newspaper “Efimeris tis Kiverniseos” numbers 322 and 324 published on November 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1926. These acts are binding to this day.

Following these acts the Greek government implemented a compulsory policy of removing all evidence of the Macedonian language from Churches, icons, monuments, tomb stones, cemeteries, archeological finds, etc. All Slavonic Church or secular literature was seized and burned. The use of the Macedonian language was forbidden also in personal communications between parents and children, among villagers, at weddings and work parties, and in burial rituals. (John Shea. “Macedonia and Greece The Struggle to define a new Balkan Nation”. Page 109)

Failing to completely Hellenize the Macedonian population subsequent Greeks government introduced pre-kindergarten schools. The pretext for these schools was to free the parents so that they could go to work but their motive became clear when such schools became available only in Greek occupied Macedonia and nowhere else in Greece. The idea here was to separate young children not from their parents but from their grandparents who traditionally looked after them and taught them values and the Macedonian language while parents were out in the fields working.

The act of forbidding the use of the Macedonian language in Greece is best illustrated by an example of how it was implemented in the Township of Assarios (Giuvezna). Here is a quote from Karakasidou's book *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood*.

"[We] listened to the president articulate to the council that in accordance with the decision [#122770] of Mr. Minister, General Governor of Macedonia, all municipal and township councils would forbid, through [administrative] decisions, the speaking of other idioms of obsolete languages within the area of their jurisdiction for the reconstitution of a universal language and our national glory. [The president] suggested that [the] speaking of different idioms, foreign [languages] and our language in an impure or obsolete manner in the area

of the township of Assirios would be forbidden. Assirios Township Decision No. 134, 13 December 1936." (Page 162, Anastasia Karakasidou, Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood)

By 1928 1,497 Macedonian place-names in the Greek occupied Macedonia were Hellenized (LAW 4096) and all Cyrillic inscriptions found in churches, on tombstones and icons were destroyed (or overwritten) prompting English Journalist V. Hild to say, "The Greeks do not only persecute living Slavs (Macedonians)..., but they even persecute dead ones. They do not leave them in peace even in the graves. They erase the Slavonic inscriptions on the headstones, remove the bones and burn them."

In the years following World War I, the Macedonian people underwent extensive measures of systematic denationalization. The applications of these "denationalization schemes" were so extensive and aggressively pursued that in the long term they eroded the will of the Macedonian people to resist.

In Greece, in 1929 during the rule of Eleftherios Venizelos, a legal act was issued 'On the protection of public order'. In line with this Act each demand for nationality rights is regarded as high treason. This law is still in force.

## The Metaxa Dictatorship

When the Macedonian people felt things couldn't get any worse in Greek occupied Macedonia, they did.

“Metaxas, having removed the last constraints on his authority, enjoying the active support of King George II, and able through him to count on the loyalty of the armed forces, now set about his long-cherished ambition of reshaping the Greek character and remoulding Greek society. Since his days as a young army officer at the Prussian military academy he had nurtured an admiration for Ernst, 'the serious German spirit', which he contrasted with the Greeks' excessive individualism and lack of a sense of corporate loyalty. In pursuit of this basic objective of 'disciplining' the Greek people heaped many of the trappings of German Nazism and Italian Fascism. In conscious imitation of Hitler's Third Reich he evolved the concept of the Third Hellenic Civilization. The first was the pagan civilization of ancient Greece, the second the Christian civilization of Byzantium. The third, which would be fashioned under his aegis, would combine the virtues of both. In pursuit of his essentially paternalistic, authoritarian style of government he had himself proclaimed in 1937 'First Peasant' and 'First Worker', and also liked to be known as 'leader' or 'National Father'. He declared a moratorium on peasant debts and introduced labour legislation that sounded progressive on paper, but much of his populist, anti-plutocratic rhetoric was belied by his practice. Workers particularly resented his introduction of compulsory arbitration of labour disputes.” (Richard Clogg. “A Short History of Modern Greece”. Page 133)

What Clogg is calling the “reshaping of Greek character and remoulding Greek society” which by the way he makes sound like it is a progressive thing, many today would call “cultural genocide”. What Metaxas did in fact is enforce existing anti-Macedonian policies to the extreme and then enacted some more of his own.

The dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas (1936-1940) was especially brutal in its treatment of the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia, who by this time had increasingly begun to identify themselves as Macedonians.

“On December 18, 1936, the Metaxas dictatorship issued a legal act concerning ‘Activity Against State Security.’ This law punished claims of minority rights. On the basis of this act, thousands of Macedonians were arrested, imprisoned, or expelled from Greece. On September 7, 1938, the legal act 2366 was issued. This banned the use of the Macedonian language even in the domestic sphere. All Macedonian localities were flooded with posters that read, ‘Speak Greek.’ Evening schools were opened in which adult Macedonians were taught Greek. No Macedonian schools of any kind were permitted. Any public manifestation of Macedonian national feeling and its outward expression through language,

song, or dance was forbidden and severely punished by the Metaxas regime. People who spoke Macedonian were beaten, fined and imprisoned. Punishments in some areas included piercing of the tongue with a needle and cutting off a part of the ear for every Macedonian word spoken. Almost 5,000 Macedonians were sent to jails and prison camps for violating this prohibition against the use of the Macedonian language. Mass exile of sections of Macedonians and other 'difficult' minorities took place. The trauma of persecution has left deep scars on the consciousness of the Macedonians in Greece, many of whom are even today convinced that their language 'cannot' be committed to writing.

Writing in 1938, Australian author Bert Birtles in his book *Exiles in the Aegean* said, 'If Greece has no Jewish problem, she has the Macedonians. In the name of 'Hellenization' these people are being persecuted continually and arrested for the most fantastic reasons. Metaxas's way of inculcating the proper nationalist spirit among them has been to change all the native place-names into Greek and to forbid use of the native language. For displaying the slightest resistance to this edict- for this too is a danger to the security of the State - peasants and villagers have been exiled without trial.'" (John Shea. "Macedonia and Greece The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation". Pages 111 and 112)

"The racism which envelops the Macedonian people in Aegean Macedonia has primarily focused on the suppression of language and identity in order to maintain territorial acquisition. It has become an ideological means to assist exploitation and denationalization. This policy results in systemic discrimination and denial of basic human rights such as self-identification. The dehumanization is validated by the argument that: you are not Macedonian, you do not have a culture, language or a name, so in fact you do not exist and therefore there is no oppression. There is sad irony in the fact that by claiming a Macedonian heritage, language and name, the Macedonians are seen as the villains whose actions are somehow threatening to Greece. This is a classic condition of oppression culture, in that the oppressor claims to feel violated by the oppressed. By claiming the process is actually occurring to themselves, Greek Governments aim to validate the need for continuing the oppression.

This type of mind-set or social outlook is unfortunately reinforced within the school system and a social system which does not promote a sense of multiculturalism. The social system which evolved after the 1913 acquisition of Macedonian territory found it necessary to create a modern Greek identity for the masses who spoke other languages within the new borders. Hellenism is the absolute antithesis of multiculturalism, which presupposes the right to self-identification and self expression." (Kita Sapurma & Pandora Petrovska. "Children of the Bird Goddess". Pollitecon Publications. 1997. Pages 162 and 163)

The Metaxas regime was particularly brutal against the rural Macedonian population where Hellenization in the past was less restrictive and most Macedonians especially the elderly and uneducated did not speak Greek. Here the Metaxas regime employed a particularly large police force where the policemen's salaries were supplemented with the funds exacted by the policemen from fines. Each policeman was paid a percentage of the fine imposed on those caught speaking Macedonian. With this kind of incentive, policemen were not only doing their patriotic duty in apprehending the criminals but they were also rewarded for their vigilance. Unfortunately those who paid the heaviest fines were the elderly and poor, people who could least afford them.

The best places to stalk their unsuspecting victims were the crowded marketplaces where old women did their shopping totally oblivious of the prowling policemen's finely tuned ears, ever listening for the offending word of a criminal speaking in their native language, the only language they knew. One gentle old widowed woman who I know personally from my village was fined the equivalent of one month's salary for asking for the price of produce at the market. She had to sell her entire year's supply of feta cheese in order to pay the fine.

I was too young at that time to ask this poor woman how it felt to be fined for speaking the only language she knew. Being unable to speak Greek how did she manage to buy a ticket on the bus to go to market? How did she ask the grocer for her groceries? Did she point to them? How did she figure out how to pay if she didn't understand the grocer's language?

We often joke about this because it is so bizarre but people were also fined for giving commands to their animals or calling out to their pets in their native language.

Another place to stalk unsuspecting victims was at their home. Greek policemen often stood outside people's windows just to hear what language they were speaking and fined the entire family if they were caught speaking Macedonian.

"The Metaxas regime, haunted by the specter of Slavism and communism, initiated a policy of accelerated assimilation. Applied by incompetent and short-sighted civil servants, it antagonized even Slavophones of the Greek faction. To peasants of Bulgarian [ethnic Macedonian] orientation it served as proof that the Greek state could not offer them a national shelter. In 1941, the occupation of Greece by the Germans and the entrance of Bulgarian troops in eastern Macedonia and Thrace offered the opportunity for accumulated bitterness to reach maturity." (Kofos. "Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia". Page 255)

After the realization set in that people would be fined and even physically punished and force fed castor oil for repeat offences, fear and

suspicion began to set in, forcing people to keep silent. It was best to look down or to look the other way when passing your neighbours on the street because you never knew who might be listening. Keeping silent was preferable to speaking to someone you knew all your life in a foreign despicable tongue you despised.

“In the past, Macedonian life and events were preserved in the folksongs, thus enabling an articulation of feelings and grief as well as cultural self-expression. When the Macedonian language was proscribed in Northern Greece, the folksongs ceased.” (Kita Sapurma & Pandora Petrovska. “Children of the Bird Goddess”. Pollitecon Publications. 1997. Page 163)

“Metaxas placed great store by the country's youth, and to this end created the National Youth Organization (EON), which was intended to be the standard bearer of his ideals after his death. Membership of EON was made mandatory and rival organizations such as the Boy Scouts were suppressed. EON, too, was seen by Metaxas as providing a substitute for the lack of any kind of mass party base for his power, the most obvious difference between the Metaxas regime and the fascist regimes that he so admired. He shared to the full, however, their hostility towards liberalism, communism and parliamentary government, and indeed their nationalism, although his nationalism was of the non-aggressive variety. Nor, moreover, was his ideology, such as it was, based on theories of racial superiority.” (Richard Clogg. “A Short History of Modern Greece”. Pages 133 and 134)

The National Youth Organization (EON) may have been the “standard bearer for Metaxas’s ideals” but it was a nightmare for the Macedonian population. Included in this organization were Macedonian youths who were poisoned by Greek propaganda and turned against their own people. Even their own parents and grandparents were seen as weak and vile and loathed for who they were. Such poisoned youths would not hesitate to turn in their own siblings or parents to the police for even the most minor offenses. While western authors ridicule Hitler for his promotion of “racial superiority” they remain silent for Metaxas’s. Much of the arrogance in modern Greeks today is owed to the Metaxas indoctrination.

Much as he hated Macedonians, Metaxas also had distaste for communists who he persecuted at no end. Since officially Macedonians did not exist, his regime was quick to accuse Macedonians of being communists and sent them to prison in the most desolate Greek island concentration camps. A whole network of Greek fascists existed spying on the people and making lists of those that could not be trusted. When Metaxas exacted his dictatorship all these “marked” people were rounded up and sent to prison. And as we will later show, these same lists were used again and again to torment the population more so the Macedonian population than any other in Greek occupied Macedonia.

If World War II had not broken out and had Metaxas lived another five years, there would be no minorities living in Greece today, Greece would have been a truly homogenous state with “pure Greeks” all being direct descendants from the ancient Greeks. Although officially Greece claims to be 98% pure, those claims today are only wishful thinking.

Being persecuted to no end, during the Metaxa era people took measures to protect themselves and took their activities underground. There still existed communists and communist organizations but by now they were all clandestine. New and more secure communications were developed which in the long term served the communists well especially during the German, Italian and Bulgarian occupation.

We cannot say that there was no relationship between the Macedonians and the democrats as many Macedonians were loyal to the Communist Party of Greece but only because it was the sole party that ever gave Macedonians the time of day. Macedonians were made scapegoats for communist activities even though Macedonians had nothing to do with those activities.

Following is a segment from John S. Koliopoulos's book “Plundered Loyalties” that deals with the subject of Macedonians and communists during the 1930's but represents the Greek point of view in this matter.

“In December 1929 the district governor of Florina reported that on visiting the Slav Macedonian villages of Ano Hydrousa, Sphika and Karyai he encountered not only resentment against state and communal taxation but also 'anti-state sentiments'. He discerned the same sentiments in the refusal of the inhabitants of five 'indigent' villages of Lake Prespa to cooperate in leasing the taxes on the lake fishery. Mikrolimni, Agios Achilleios, Bronteron, Kallithea and Pyksos apparently harboured 'anti-state' sentiments. Such an attitude and the inroads the communists were able to make in Slav Macedonian villages in the 1930s led to stringent legislative and administrative measures, especially by the right-wing dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas (1936-41). In addition to banning the speaking of Slav Macedonian in public, the dictatorship imprisoned or deported an unknown number of communist cadres of the region, many of them Slav Macedonians or simply sensitive to their grievances. Gendarmerie and administrative and appointed communal officials, in their effort to curry favour with the strong men of the day, were prepared to go out of their way to combat communist and 'anti-state' sentiments. Pastoralists of the region were obliged to provide evidence of their true Greek sentiments to be able to rent summer grazing land. Gendarmerie officers and appointed village headmen had to be satisfied that applicants for such transactions were 'God-fearing family men' and 'nationalists'. Neither Slav Macedonians nor refugees were considered to be above suspicion.

A Maniot gendarmerie officer named Periandros Poulakos was representative of state officials of the period in the region. As commanding officer of the Amygdala gendarmerie station, he made a name for himself in the district of Eordaea as a ruthless guardian of law and order as conceived by the Metaxas dictatorship. In December 1938, assisted by the village chief of the National Youth Organization (Ethniki Organosis Neon) (EON) and under orders from the district governor of Kozani, he arrested an inhabitant who was seen in the village cafe when he was expected to attend church like others. In March 1939 the same officer arrested, again with the assistance of the Youth chief and the president of the village of Koila, an inhabitant of that village who opened his coffee shop, which he also used as a barber's shop, on Independence Day (25 March) to shave two village men. Several inhabitants made statements under oath that from that and similar behaviour in the past they were convinced that the barber was a communist sympathizer. Several months later Poulakos arrested a Slav Macedonian in the village of Ermakia and other members of his family and kept them in custody, longer than was permitted in an effort to extract the depositions he was demanding. The Slav Macedonian with another man of the same village beat the village field guard, a refugee who had caught them stealing grapes from a vineyard.

Had it not been for the war and the ensuing foreign occupation of the region in the first half of the 1940s, the ruthless drive to transform the region in the ways described might possibly have succeeded. However those events put an end to this process of assimilating different linguistic and cultural groups into a homogeneous national community and initiated, instead, developments that further intensified existing cleavages.” (John S. Koliopoulos. “Plundered Loyalties”. Pages 44-46)

After war broke out in the Balkans, the first to fall to fascist aggression was Albania. By an ultimatum delivered to Albania on March 23, 1939, Italian troops landed in Albania and occupied its territory on April 7, encountering little resistance. Soon after consolidating control in Albania, on October 28th, 1940, Italy declared war on Greece. Greece however turned out to be tough to defeat and Metaxa's foresight in arming his state paid off.

Official history praises Greece and Greek soldiers for their bravery and fighting spirit but neglects to mention the contributions and sacrifices Macedonians made to keep Greece safe. Macedonians were the first to be dispatched to the front lines in Albania, taking the full brunt of the offensive as well as the winter cold. More Macedonian men suffered from gangrene than from Italian bullets and bombs. Unprepared for the frigid temperatures, many men lost their fingers, toes, limbs and even their lives to frostbite. Food too was in short supply as the brave Macedonian soldiers had to fight off starvation as well as the Italians. They did this to protect a country that refused and still refuses to recognize them.

“The first intimations of what was to come had been sensed before the Axis occupation, as early as the winter of 1940-1, even as Greece was fighting Italy people wondered about the attitude of the Slav Macedonians: would they fight with the rest of the Greeks? The great majority of them did fight the Italians even more tenaciously than most southern Greeks, if only because the fighting was taking place not far from their homes. The local army units were the first to repulse the Italian invaders in October and the first to march into Albania in November....

...A related warning was the deportation of a number of Slav Macedonians during the war for security reasons. They were mostly communists, or people whom the authorities did not trust to move freely in the zone of military operations.” (John S. Koliopoulos. “Plundered Loyalties”. Page 50)

All their sacrifices were in vain because six months later on April 6th, 1941 the German army marched into Greece.

## **The Italian, German and Bulgarian occupation**

The German invasion was a welcome relief for the soldiers from the Italian front, but at the same time it posed an uneasy uncertainty as to what was going to happen next. No one was certain how the new invaders were going to react. The Macedonian people, having ample experience with being occupied, were expecting the worst. As time would show however the new invaders were a mixed blessing for the Macedonian people.

After war broke out in Europe, Bulgaria allied itself with the axis powers and on March 1, 1941 joined the German led pact.

By the end of April, 1941 Greek occupied Macedonia was divided into three occupied zones: Eastern Macedonia east from the river Struma along with Thrace was held by Fascist Bulgaria, the southern part of Kostur Region, Kozheni Region and part of Lerin Region was held by the Italians and central Macedonia to Solun was occupied by the Germans. All territories from central and southern Greek occupied Macedonia, where a large segment of approximately 200,000 Macedonian people lived, was left under the jurisdiction of the Greek collaborationist government of general Cholakoglu the man who surrendered Greece to the axis powers.

It took about two months before law and order was re-established in Greek occupied Macedonia and this was done by restoring the old Greek fascist regime, the same regime that supported the Metaxas government. In other words the occupiers needed people to do their bidding so the people who served the Metaxas dictatorship were now the servants of the new masters.

Many Macedonians from the Republic of Macedonia who had suffered under the Yugoslav regime welcomed the Bulgarian invaders as saviors and liberators. Their euphoria however was short-lived as the Bulgarians quickly began to oppress and forcibly Bulgarize the Macedonian population. If there had been any pro-Bulgarian sentiment before, it quickly disappeared after the occupation. Germany's violent entry into Yugoslavia, coupled with Bulgarian oppressive attitudes towards the Macedonian people, gave birth to an underground Macedonian resistance movement.

In Greek occupied Macedonia the new occupiers formed gendarmes from the local collaborators called "ekatondarhi" whose initial purpose was to recruit local individuals from the villages who would be willing to spy on their neighbours and inform on those working against the occupier. The gendarmes also acted as the new security forces by establishing gendarme stations in the villages to keep an eye on the people and to requisition food, labour and other supplies for the occupiers and for the Greek quisling government.

Individuals who worked for the occupiers were well paid but at the same time they were abusive and unruly and would not hesitate to use

repressive measures against their own people. This attitude created resentment which led to the formation of resistance movements.

To counter the gendarme's oppressive tactics the old Komiti (Ilinden revolutionary guard) was rearmed by the Italians who took advantage of the situation. The "old timers" were angered by Greece's oppressive laws and were spurred back into action by Bulgarian propaganda which condemned the oppressive Greek tactics. The Bulgarians were well aware of the unfavourable conditions the Metaxas and later the Greek quisling Government had created in Greek occupied Macedonia and used the opportunity to agitate the Greeks. Komiti actions were limited at best and were restricted to the Italian zones, as the Germans would not tolerate armed actions in their zones.

Another group to quickly react to the repressive measures of the occupiers and their collaborators was the democratic element which was active in the various towns and villages. Many democrats, communist sympathizers and others accused of being communists that were jailed by the Metaxas government escaped or were freed by the Germans after Greece's capitulation. These people immediately went to work rebuilding their organizations in secret and agreed to form a unified front to struggle against the new occupiers. The democrats were the first to approach the Macedonian people for help in their struggle while reminding them that between 1924 and 1935 the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) was the only party which supported their rights as Macedonians. As we will later see this was only a ploy to (1) attract Macedonians into their struggle and (2) to counter the Bulgarian propaganda which offered similar benefits.

Although the CPG had suffered more than the non-democratic politicians during the Metaxas dictatorship it was able to take advantage of its internal discipline and exploit its greater experience of clandestine activity to good effect during the occupation. The non-communist politicians, by contrast, were for the most part on the periphery of dramatic events during the war years.

The restoration of the old Greek Metaxas regime in central and south Greek occupied Macedonia (eastern Macedonia was occupied by Bulgaria) was accepted with much displeasure by the Macedonian people, especially by those villages which suffered the most under the Metaxas dictatorship, when around 5,000 Macedonians were charged with heavy fines and were jailed for speaking Macedonian, their mother tongue. Those people in the face of the new gendarmes, who came to the villages to establish the old gendarme stations, saw the return of the old dictatorial and discriminatory regime and the return of new terror and oppression.

In the fall of 1941 in the village Sarakinovo, Meglen Region, the villagers held the armed gendarmes at bay for three days and would not allow them to re-claim the old gendarme building. The impasse was only broken after the Sobotsko gendarme arrived with help. In the village

Banitsa, Lerin Region, the villagers opened fire on the gendarme in an attempt to prevent it from occupying the gendarme station. The gendarme gained entry only after the Germans intervened, which unfortunately had negative consequences for the people of the surrounding region. The Germans jailed 60 people from Banitsa, Tsereovo and Gornichevo and killed one person from each village. The following people were taken to Lerin and executed: Dine Ljakov from Banitsa, Stavre (Kitse) Stangolev from Gornichevo and Mijale Tashonov from Tsereovo.

Even though the Banitsa resistance was purely a defensive act strictly aimed at preventing former Metaxas elements from taking hold, it was not tolerated by the Germans. In other words, the occupier would only tolerate those who served his interests.

Resistance actions to gendarmes similar to those in Banitsa and Sarakinovo were also organized in the villages Nered, German, and Zelenich, in Lerin Region, Tresino in Meglen Region and Kolomnati in Kostur Region. This is only a small example of what really took place in the struggle against the installation of the former Metaxas dictatorial regime.

The Greek response to all this was typical and characteristic of Greek reactions. Instead of seeing these as defensive actions against an internal aggressor they saw them as a “Bulgarophil movement” which associated the Macedonian people with the enemy. If these actions were indeed the actions of a “Bulgarophil movement” how then do they explain what took place in the Greek village of Mesovuno in 1941?

The village Mesovuno in Kajlar Region, previously called Krmsko was repopulated with Christian Turk settlers from the Pont and the Caucasus in 1924 and renamed from Krmsko to Mesovuno in 1926 by the Greek state. This village was populated by pure and trusted Greeks, yet as we will see this village too rebelled against the Greeks in 1941.

The village Krmsko is located on the west side of Mount Karakamen and fell smack in the middle of the Greek army’s second defensive line in the Albanian front which stretched from Mount Karakamen to Mount Kajmakchalan during the Greek-Italian war of 1940-41. After Greece’s capitulation to the Axis powers, the Greek army retreated and abandoned storehouses of arms, ammunition and supplies. With no one to guard the warehouse near Krmsko, the villagers took the opportunity to arm themselves in preparation for an unknown future. Among those involved in organizing the warehouse raid included were the teacher Alekso Hadgi Tashkov from Katranitsa, Georgios Petridis and Neofitos Antopulos. Upon acquiring arms the villagers of Krmsko began to organize military formations and carried out war exercises

As the gendarmes formed teams of people from all walks of life, in the fall of 1941 they dispatched them to the villages to requisition food supplies such as wheat, corn and other goods which were to be surrendered

to the occupiers and to the Greek quisling government. One such team supported by a gendarme was sent to Krmsko where upon its entry into the village, was stormed and disarmed by the villagers. No one was harmed but the villagers made it clear that if the team ever returned its members would all be killed.

Unable to squash the Krmsko uprising by force, the Regional Governor of Kozheni decided to replace Janis Mourena the Krmsko Municipality President with Pavlos Konstantinidis, one of his own people. That however did not go so well because the first act of the new president was to call on regional gendarmes and the Germans to help him occupy Krmsko. In view of this the villagers found the new president guilty of being an agent of the occupier and had him assassinated.

Upon finding this out, in the morning of October 11, 1941, a gendarme from Katranitsa was dispatched to Krmsko to capture those responsible for the assassination. Expecting retaliation, the villagers of Krmsko were prepared for an ambush and as soon as the gendarme arrived it was surrounded and disarmed.

Still unable to put down the revolt, the Greek quislings called on the Germans for assistance and on October 16, German soldiers arrived and a fire fight ensued. Still unable to suppress the revolt after a short skirmish, the Germans left for Kozheni only to return several days later with a larger force.

In the morning of October 23<sup>rd</sup>, the people of Krmsko woke up to find their village surrounded. For their courageous stand many paid with their lives. The entire male population from 15 to 60 years of age (146 people) was taken and executed in the village meadows.

Something similar happened to the Macedonian village of Ekshisu but for other reasons. In October 1941 Yannis Papaperos, a Greek officer and staunch Grkoman (a Macedonian who believes he is Greek and supports the Greek cause), made an agreement with other Greek officers of the surrounding Lerin Region gendarmes to attack his own village Ekshisu. The purpose of the attack, which was to be carried out in the dark of night, was to capture and kill the Macedonian leaders and make it look like the communists did it.

Ekshisu was indeed attacked in the night but the villagers who were armed retaliated and fought back repealing the attackers but not without a price. Among the village men who fought, killed were Kole Madzhov, Kiril Tsitskov, Romanov and Kitse Karov.

Even though clearly this clash was provoked by the Greek officers, the Germans held the village accountable and had the entire civilian population locked up in the village church for three days and three nights without food or water. Subsequently, 30 people were sent to jail to the Jedikule prison in Solun. One of the residents, Boris Kargov, was sentenced to death and executed.

At the time of the attack about 300 of those who took up arms against the Greek officers fled to Mount Radush and remained there until the danger was over. Twelve of them became Partisans and remained in the mountains permanently. They were Gjorgi and Iljo Turundzhiev, Kiro Piljaev, Trivko Popov, Mih Kargov, Ilija Popov, Minche Alipashov, Trajko Lisichev, Krume Ashelov, Jordan Shepardonov and two others. All twelve men were from Ekshisu and all later became organizers of a wider resistance movement and participated in a small armed detachment of resistance fighters.

At the end of June 1941, the sixth plenum of the central committee of the CPG met to formulate a plan to defend against the occupiers and to overthrow the foreign fascist yoke. To this end the people were invited to join in the formation of the Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF), which was founded in September 1941. Although the democrats and the CPG were dominant in the GNLF from the beginning there were other small left wing coalition partners such as the agrarian parties and others. In its propaganda the GNLF took care not to scare off potential recruits, in what was fundamentally a conservative and traditional society, with wild talk of land collectivization or nationalization. It stressed instead its patriotic role as a focus for resistance to the Axis. It also demanded that, on liberation, a constituent assembly should be summoned so that the sovereign Greek people might decide on their future form of government.

In a secretly circulated pamphlet entitled “what is the GNLF and what are its aims?” the first aim was “to protect the people against hunger, illness and want”. Other aims included the raising of morale, opposition to all forms of collaboration and the National Liberation Struggle”. The GNLF endeavoured to have a representative in every village wherever possible.

The Partisan movement in Yugoslavia was more organized and more progressive than that in Greece. Led by Tito, the Communist partisans in Yugoslavia organized a war of national liberation in which the Macedonians fought on an equal footing. Macedonians formed their own section of resistance even before they were recognized and accepted by Tito. The first anti-fascist war of national liberation began in the Republic of Macedonia on October 11, 1941. The Macedonian people by their actions, loyalty and patriotism earned their place in the world. By hardship, determination and the spilling of blood the Macedonian people demonstrated their desire for freedom and the willingness to rule themselves. The Great Powers in 1829 (by the London Protocol) satisfied the Greeks by making Greece a country. Similarly in 1878 (by the congress of Berlin) Russia liberated the Bulgarians making Bulgaria a country. Unlike the Greeks and Bulgarians, however, the brave Macedonian people had to fight by themselves, for themselves, to earn their place in the world among the free nations.

In April 1942 the Macedonian people in the Republic of Macedonia rose up and demonstrated their displeasure against the Bulgarian yoke and Macedonian Partisans took up arms against the Bulgarian army but were massacred in a bloody battle. Unarmed Macedonians then took to the streets to protest the massacre and they too were cut to pieces.

To escape persecution, sections of the Macedonian Partisan force from the Republic of Macedonia fled into Greek occupied Macedonia. Some entered the Italian zones near the village Besfina and the rest penetrated the German zones in the region around the village Sveta Petka and quickly went underground. The Besfina force, before it had a chance to make contact with the local population, was spotted by the Komiti who quickly sprang into action. Seeing uniformed men on the Besfina hillside startled the old Komiti. Thinking that it was a Greek gendarme invasion, the Komiti appealed to the local Italian garrison and were given arms and permission to attack. When the Komiti started the offensive the Partisans backed off and sent representatives to negotiate. They went from village to village and spoke with the local chiefs. The strangers wore handsome uniforms and conducted themselves seriously, with charm and charisma. They spoke long and well about freedom, liberty and the treachery of the Bulgarian Fascists.

When the Komiti found out that the uniformed men were Macedonians they accepted them with open arms, gave them (surrendered) their weapons and many voluntarily joined their cause. The Partisans of Sveta Petka, because of a German presence, had to work under cover but they too succeeded in recruiting volunteers from the local population. After the Partisan penetration, the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia learned about the Bulgarian atrocities committed in the Republic of Macedonia and ceased to believe the Bulgarian propaganda. The old Ilinden guard was demobilized and replaced by a Partisan movement.

Partisan organizers took extraordinary measures to explain to the Macedonian people that they were fighting for the freedom and liberation of the Macedonian people from the tyranny of the oppressive states. The Macedonian involvement in this war, and later in the Greek civil war, was not about "Communist ideologies" or about alliances or obligations to the Great Powers. It was simply the next stage in the long struggle for "liberation from oppression" and to fulfill a longing for freedom, re-unification and self-rule. The Macedonian contribution in fighting against Fascism is not only under emphasized but also misinterpreted by historians. I will once again say that the Macedonian people, during the Second Great War (WWII), rose on the democratic side and fought against fascism for the liberation of the states in which they lived. The Macedonian people, like other people in the Balkans, fought to liberate their homeland and thus earn their place in the world. This cannot be ignored and must be recognized and recorded in the annals of history.

Word of a Macedonian Partisan movement in Greek occupied Macedonia spread like wildfire. People came out on the streets to freely speak their native Macedonian language, to sing songs and write Macedonian plays and poetry. The Partisans even set up Macedonian schools and taught children patriotic songs, poems and Macedonian history, using local Macedonian dialects. The younger generations, for the first time, saw written words in their beloved, sacred Macedonian language. The newfound freedom brought happiness to the lives of the oppressed Macedonian people who welcomed the Partisans into their villages as "our own boys and girls". The newfound confidence and strength projected by the Macedonians terrified the Greeks, especially the gendarmes and the collaborators. For a while they were no longer a threat.

The Germans and Italians did not care one way or another about Macedonian affairs as long as there was no trouble for them. Macedonian interest in Partisan activities continued to climb, bringing new recruits and volunteers to the cause. Youth organizations were created with young men and women recruited to be the eyes and ears of the community and to help defend the villages. Many young volunteers of military age were recruited and trained to perform policing and civic duties in the newly formed organizations. The organization Macedonian National Liberation Front in Greece (MNLF(G)) which was separate from that in the Republic of Macedonia (MNLF(Y)) was formed and began recruiting fighters from the Kostur, Lerin and Voden regions.

## The National Liberation Front

With the old Metaxas dictatorship state apparatus re-established in Greek occupied Macedonia under the protection of the German, Italian and Bulgarian Fascists, the Macedonian people again found themselves vulnerable and open to abuse. They had no other choice but to devise their own forms of defense for which they heavily depended on the democrats. Most democrats unfortunately were in jail but as luck would have it, with the capitulation of the Greek state, many were released.

Even before they were sent to jail, democrats were regularly abused in Greece and in their defense had organized strategies to deal with the abusers. Then as they fled the jails they went back to reorganize those strategies and restore their party organizations and this time to prepare resistance against the new occupiers.

The main strength of the party came from a group of twenty-four leaders and communist sympathizers who were freed from Akranavlion, a Middle Ages prison, through the actions of Julia Shaider. Julia Shaider who was of German descent, was married to Nedelko Popnedelkov, a resident of Solun who during the Metaxas era was accused of being a communist and jailed in the Akranavlion prison. Speaking fluent German Julia Shaider took her husband's case directly to the German command. She managed to convince the Germans that her husband was in jail not because he was a communist but because he was a Macedonian. Under Julia Shaider's advisement other prisoners "who spoke Macedonian" were also released. Among the prisoners released were Lazo Trpovski, Andrea Chinov, Lazo Damovski, Rusalim Harizani, Gjorgji Peikov, Andrea Dzhuma, Atnas Zjogas, Lazo Bozhiniv, Lambro Moskov, Trpo Kalimanov, Ziso Kalimanov, Foti Urumov, Dimitar Leskov, Anastas Karadzha, Kiro Pilijev, Nedelko Popnedelkov, Teodoros Eftimijadis, Bahuevanov and others.

Julia Shaider's intervention was later used by the Greek press and Greek historians as "proof" of the Greek Communist Party's (CPG) "collaboration" with the occupiers in an attempt to "sell" Macedonia to the Bulgarians. The truth however paints a different picture. The reason the Greek Minister for Public Security Maniadakis, deliberately labeled these people Communists, had them jailed and surrendered to the occupier is so that they could be exterminated without putting blame on the Greeks. The minister was well aware of how the Fascists felt about communists and what better way to eliminate patriotic Macedonians than label them communist and let the occupier deal with them.

We will not get into detail here as to why the fascists hated communists and why Goebbels and the Gestapo fabricated information to slander the CPG but we will say that the moment someone was labeled communist they were quickly acquainted with the occupier's practices, i.e.

automatic jail sentence to be served in one of the concentration camps and then to be executed in retaliation for Partisan interventions.

After Hitler began his attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the CPG in Greece and in Greek occupied Macedonia was placed on alert. All progressive organizations in major cities such as Solun, Voden, Negush, Kostur, Lerin, etc., were quickly re-established and rearmed with new arms. One of the strongest organizations, founded by the Macedonian Trifun Hadzhijanov in 1924, was reactivated in Voden on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1941. In September of the same year this organization re-established connections with the CPG for Macedonia in Solun through Yannis Tifengopoulos, an old cadre of the CPG code named "The Turk", who had escaped from the Akronavlion prison. Hadzhjanov was one of Tifengopoulos's protégés and learned much from him while serving time in the concentration camps in the islands.

Most of the strength for the Voden branch of the party came from the farm worker syndicates, factories and cooperatives in the region. This organization was the prime motivator behind the organized demonstrations, strikes against rising prices, black markets and other activities.

Besides the Voden successes, similar activities were also taking place in Lerin and Kostur Regions including arms acquisitions and stockpiling ammunition and other war materials.

In the fall of 1941 Kostur Region was particularly active mainly due to the involvement of the people from the village Dmbeni; Lazo Trpovski's birth place.

The village Gabresh too played an active role in arming the resistance by raiding an abandoned storehouse full of ammunition. Among the arsenals recovered were bombs and other materials left over from the Greek army. The arsenal was distributed to various resistance groups with 300 cases of ammunition going to Dmbeni and some light arms and one anti-aircraft cannon going to the town of Rupishcha.

During the summer of 1941 another organization was formed in Gumendzhansko Region in the village Izvor. This particular organization was charged with the task of conducting missions against the railway line running between Gevgelija and Solun. For these missions the Partisans needed dynamite and other explosive materials which they acquired from a warehouse in Izvor hidden near Mount Kozhuv. As a result of such missions, the Gevgelija-Solun rail was mined three times in the course of 1941 alone. Unfortunately such actions were not without consequences. The first retaliatory act by the Germans and quisling Greeks took place in September 1941 when a gendarme from Gumendzhe was sent to surround the village Plagia in an effort to capture and jail those suspected of being communists. Among those included in the list were Tsangaras, Kozakis and Vafiadis (Nikos). During this mission three gendarmes broke into

Kozakis's house and apprehended Kozakis. But before they could exit the yard, Kozakis produced a pistol and shot and killed one of the gendarmes. He shot the second but only wounded him. Fearing for his life the third dropped his weapon and gear and fled. Tsangaras, Kozakis and Vafiadis then fled to the Republic of Macedonia.

In spite of all efforts on the part of the small resistance groups, the Greek quisling government, supported by the occupiers Germany, Italy and Bulgaria, was still wreaking havoc in Greek occupied Macedonia and it was a matter of time before all resistance groups would be squashed, unless of course a more massive effort was organized.

This effort came in the form of a Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF) on September 27, 1941. The GNLF's aim was to unite all people in Greece and coordinate a defensive effort with similar organizations in other Balkan states. The GNLF, although largely supported by the democrats, was aimed to appeal to everyone.

At the outset the main role of the GNLF was to protect the population from exploitation and terror and to begin a struggle to drive out the occupiers.

As to what role the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia were to play in this organization and in the struggle in general, can be found in the Seventh plenum of the Central Committee of the Greek Communist Party of September 1941 and in the Eighth plenum of December 1942, where it was mentioned that: "The national minorities in Greece, especially the Macedonians need to unite their struggle with the national-liberation struggle of the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian people against the occupiers". ("The Ten Year Struggle", Athens 1935-1945, Pages 126-169).

As mentioned in the introduction of this write-up, the Third Congress of the CPG held between November 26 and December 3, 1924 supported a united Macedonian state in a future Balkan federation. Due to its unpopularity amongst the Greeks, this policy was replaced during the Sixth Congress in December 1935 with a new policy supporting equal rights for all national minorities in Greece, including the Macedonians. So one can hardly blame the Macedonians for being suspicious about joining Greek lead organizations especially after experiencing decades of anti-Macedonian conduct from the various regimes in Greece. Besides, even among the ranks of the so called "progressives of the day" there existed visible elements from yesterday's ranks of the former "dictatorial apparatus".

While Macedonians and progressive Greeks were trying to iron out their differences, the Greek quisling government and its spies and gendarmes were busy gathering information on the resistance movements. It did not take too long for the Germans to use that information and round up, jail and execute people without hearings. Among the people executed on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1941 in Lerin Region were Kon. Lijakov, Stavros

Stangulis and Mih. Tesijanov for allegedly possessing and concealing arms. On September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1941 Stefanos Hristoforidis and Kostas Klasidis were executed in Solun, no reason was given. On October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1941 Jeremijas Stefanidis, Kirjakos Chotilis and Kostas were killed in the village Gostoljubi, Meglen Region for allegedly moving arms. On October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1941 Panajotis Jalamas was executed in Enidzhe-Vardar for allegedly taking part in the resistance. On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1941 Mihail Vojadzhopulos was hung in Nigrita for allegedly taking part in the resistance. On November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1941 Macedonian students Ilija Kapeshev and Sokrat Djariros in Solun were executed, no reason given. On December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1941 496 people were executed in the German zone (Solun Region, Kukush Region, Gumendzha Region, Voden Region and part of Lerin Region) for allegedly raising arms, alleged sabotage and alleged participation in acts against the occupier. More were killed in actions with the Nigrita Region detachment "Andrutsos" in the village Krmsko, Kaljar Region. (The stats above were reported in the newspaper "Makhethonia" in Solun on February 19, 1959).

Unfortunately even with all those people killed, the Germans were not satisfied and with help from the Greek police got hold of the old Metaxas lists of people that were sent to jail for allegedly being communists. Among the people captured and sent to the "Pavlos Melas" concentration camp in Solun included were Jani Takev, Dinko Delevski, Zisi Mesimercheto, Risto Petrlev, Foti Tipev, Gjorgji Dimovski, Jani Sheretov, Hristo Popov and Dimitar Leskov all from Voden Region. Similar actions were also undertaken by the Italians in Kostur Region. A special battalion under the command of Major De Prema circulated around Kostur Region looking for hidden arms. The Italian move was motivated by Dailakis's execution. Dailakis was a well known collaborator who was executed on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1941 by the resistance movement from the village Zhipanishta. Among those suspected of doing the killing were Micho Shishkov, Vangel Tankov, Ziko Kolijovski, Teohar Burinchkov and Atanas Poplekov.

Towards the end of October 1941 Atanas Nizamov from Bapchor, who worked with the Italians, secretly informed Kosta Trpchevski in Dmbeni that the Italians had a list with twenty-five names who belonged to the resistance organization in that village. Trpchevski immediately acted on the warning and saved many lives. The next day the Italians arrived, blockaded the village and began to round up those who remained. All the men were detained, jailed and tortured in Naso Kondov's house. The Italians lifted the blockade on October 28, 1941, when a large number of the detained were sent to various jails. Sixteen were taken to the "Averov" prison in Athens and in the spring of 1942 were transferred to the concentration camps in Karditsa, Thessaly and killed. Among them were Zhurkov Naum, Moskov Naum, Andriovski Hristo, Kenkov Zhivko, Skivinov Staso and Chekrov Nikola. In November 1942 Kosta Trpovski,

the secretary of the Dmbeni resistance organization, was captured and sent to the Avarov prison. Another 8 men were taken to “Hajdari”, a dreaded concentration camp outside Athens.

Nineteen people were also killed in Nastram including Paskal Liveradov, Niko Popjanov, Slave Todorov and Yane Chakurovski. Similar acts were also committed in Drenoveni, Rupishta and others villages.

The Greek police in Kostur had many lists with names of people suspected of belonging to the resistance. Those lists were given to the occupiers and used to round up and jail people.

The Italians closely cooperated with the gendarmes and on many occasions conducted joint search and destroy missions while looking for arms. In December 1942 the notorious Italian “search and destroy battalion” from the village Drenoveni attacked the city of Volos in Thessaly and killed Ljondo Popvasilev, Andon Bita and Atanas Lazarov.

The occupiers were determined to eradicate the resistance movement from the beginning and their persistence would have succeeded had it not been for the well established resistance organizations in Greek occupied Macedonia. Unfortunately being pursued by the Germans, Italians, Bulgarians, the Greek police, the gendarmes and sometimes by the Communist Party of Greece definitely had an effect on the Macedonian people which lead them to pursue more drastic measures to defend themselves.

The first line of defense for the Macedonians was to arm themselves against collaborators responsible for sending people to prison and to their death. The first Partisan group to organize such as defense was in Kostur in the village Zhupanishta. This group, on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1941, took action to eliminate Laki a well known collaborator. Then around mid-April 1942, against the wishes of the CPG, the first Partisan detachment was formed. The initiation ceremony took place in the Sveta Trojtsa monastery in the presence of Lazo Trpovski. Naum Pejov was appointed commander and Kosta Trpovski was named commissar. Unfortunately about a month later Kosta Trpovski was captured by the Italians and sentenced to life in hard labour and was sent to the Avarov prison.

During the detachment’s inaugural ceremonies the question of “what symbols should the fighters wear” came up. Lazo Trpovski put forward the idea that the men should wear the Macedonian flag on their sleeves, an idea that was wholeheartedly applauded by the Macedonians except for secretary Zhiogas, a Vlah from Kostur, who disagreed and persistently insisted that this struggle must be lead with a Greek flag as a Greek national liberation struggle. This naturally created friction between the Macedonians on one hand, who as a minority, were promised rights and on the other hand by the Greek communists who not only did not trust the Macedonians but did everything in their power to take away those rights.

Unfortunately under such conditions the detachment could not function for more than a couple of months and was disbanded.

On a national level however, as more and more people were targeted by the occupier and by the Greek quisling government, many fled to the mountains for safety and were recruited by the struggle movement. With the Greek National Liberation Front being established in many regions, the struggle movement needed an armed wing to recruit, arm and train fighters and to conduct military campaigns.

In December 1941 by a joint decision between the central committee of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) and the leadership of the Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF), the National Liberation Army of Greece (NLAG) was formed. Soon afterwards, in January 1942, the central committee of GNLF selected a central committee to lead the NLAG and in February of the same year NLAG was made public and began its recruitment of officers and fighters. Most of the NLAG fighters in Greek occupied Macedonia were Macedonian volunteers.

I just want to mention at this point that in the winter of 1941-2 a number of other (non-communist) resistance organizations also came into being in Greece. The National Republican Greek League (EDES) was the most important, but these organizations were of less significance and will not be included in our analysis.

The initial objectives of the NLAG were to take action against the occupier's tax services, disable bandit bands, subdue the gendarmes and burn the gendarme archives. NLAG's actions against the Greek quisling government quickly gained the sympathy and trust of the ordinary people.

During the summer of 1942 in the central part of Greek occupied Macedonia a detachment of NLAG subdued a band of robbers on Mount Pajak. This particular band, while pillaging the surrounding villages, was putting the blame on the resistance fighters.

On December 3, 1942 NLAG conducted its first military campaign against the occupier in the Gumendzha Region by successfully destroying the Greek gendarme post at Boemidzhki Bridge, killing all the German guards and capturing the gendarmes. The bridge was bombed and destroyed along with a German train. The train engineer and a German officer (a major) on board were both killed. One hundred and twenty regular partisans and 250 volunteers from the neighbouring Gumendzhe villages took part in this mission.

The importance of this mission was captured by historiographer Chrysochoou who wrote: "During the night of December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1942 an armed group of EAM (GNLF) resistance fighters attacked and destroyed the railway station in Gumendzhe capturing one officer and five gendarmes and killing the German train engineer. Similarly the group destroyed the German bridge watchtower, wounding a German soldier and five Czech workers. The same Partisan group on the night of December 7<sup>th</sup>

attacked the Mavrodendro mine near the village Fanos, and stole large amounts of dynamite and other items.” (Chrysochoou , “The Occupation in Macedonia”, Thessaloniki 1950, Vol. 1, Page 40)

In less than a week after the first Partisan attack, the Germans retaliated with a counter attack on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1941. However, instead of pursuing the resistance group in Mounts Pajak and Kozhuv, the Germans rounded up a large number of people from the surrounding villages and sent them to the Pavlos Melas concentration camp in Solun. Twelve people from Ljuminitsa alone were jailed and one named Frints was immediately executed.

In their hunt for resistance fighters the Germans discovered a Partisan camp in the village Ite at Mount Kozhuv and immediately burned it down along with a warehouse full of food and ammunition.

As punishment for destroying a German train, bombing a bridge and attacking the watch tower, the Germans, on December 12, 1942, killed 25 innocent people in Solun. (“Makhethonia”, February 20, 1959)

The Pajak and Kozhuv Partisan groups lead several battles with the German army but being unable to push the Germans back they decided to abandon their bases in Mount Kajmakchalan and moved to Mount Karakamen. Since then the resistance movement continued to gain strength throughout the whole of Voden Region. Among the first Macedonian Partisans from Voden Region to join the Kajmakchalan group were Kosta Simadi, Gito Salahorov, Kosta Tsironkov, Aleko Tsrvenkata, Vangel Kordalov, Hristo Pochevov, Kolokotron, Atanas Provata and others.

As the resistance movement continued to grow new detachments were formed. In 1943 another detachment was formed in Pajak which was joined by some of the most elite Macedonian fighters from the city of Gumendzhe. Among them were Aleko Zelenkov, Aleko Pishuta, Atanas Popstojanov, Tomo Sadrazanov, Vangel Karagjorgjev and Ivan Kovachev. Others known to have joined were Klearhos Dimchevski from Ljuminitsa, Apostol Simovski from Izvor and a number of young men from Tsrna Reka, Barovitsa, Kriva and other villages.

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1943 the first Lerin Region resistance detachment called “Vicho” was formed in the village Lagen. Among the first fighters to join this detachment were Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, Kocho Kalinov, Lambe Popovski, Miltiadi Popnikolov, Gjorgij Kalinov, Gjorgij Rusov, Jani Chochev, Hristo Sahidis-Pandelis Masiotis, Giogos Gavriilidis, Pashalis Papadopoulos – Spartakos, Atanas Furtunas and Stojan from Lerin. A few days later more men enlisted including Risto Kolentsev from Lerin bringing the number to 35.

The first actions of the Vicho detachment were to disarm the gendarme located in the village Voshtareni (Ofchareni) in Lerin Region. Here 20 men were apprehended and disarmed and their arms, ammunition and food were apprehended. This was a moral victory for the struggle not only for

the acquisition of materials but because it deprived the occupiers of their security and their resources.

The day after, it was announced that about 5,000 Partisans were active in the city's surrounding region which forced the German command in Lerin to barricade itself and to take strong counter measures.

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1943 the Partisans attacked and destroyed a train on the Lerin-Voden rail line in order to free the political prisoners being transported. Among those freed was Haralambos Haralambidis – Atanatos. Four Germans were killed and Papatnasiou, a well known collaborator, was wounded. All the prisoners were freed and in the process a large number of arms were acquired.

On several occasions the Vicho detachment combined forces with the Dame Gruev detachment from Bitola to perform joint missions. One of the more successful missions was the disarming of the Macedonian villages in Kostur Region.

Armed by the Italians and misled by the Bulgarian fascist propaganda, Kostur Region villagers, thinking that the Partisans were Greek gendarmes, were ready to fight against them. But as soon as they found out the detachments were Macedonian, they not only surrendered their arms but most joined the Macedonian detachments. Four months after its formation the Vicho detachment had more than 80 fighters.

On July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1943 the leadership decided to split this detachment into four smaller ones. The newly created detachments were “Vicho”, “Kajmakchalan” under the command of Ilija Dimovski - Gotse, “Bigla” under Mito Tupurkovski – Titan’s command and “Dauli”, each named after the mountain where they were to be active.

The vast majority of leaders and fighters in these detachments were Macedonians and this did not bode well with the Communist Party of Greece but in spite of its objections Macedonians continued to conduct business as usual and recruit Macedonian fighters from an overwhelming pool of volunteers.

Even in Kostur, after the initial failure to form a lasting all Macedonian resistance group in April 1942, a new detachment was born in September 1943. This detachment was named “Lazo Trpovski” after the influential Macedonian fighter and political leader from Dmbeni who had been killed in the village Imera, Kozheni Region on April 11, 1943 by a band of collaborators belonging to the racist Panhellenic Liberation Organization.

The Macedonian lead detachments were very popular with the Macedonian people and attracted massive numbers of recruits from the Macedonian population which unfortunately disturbed the Greek leadership in the CPG, GNLF and NLAG who lead the struggle under a pre-determined national all Greek platform. Even though Macedonians continued their solidarity with the progressive Greeks in a unified struggle to expel the occupier, the Greeks did not trust them and began to plant

seeds of discontent. The truth of their aims was never revealed but actions spoke truer than words. Besides attempting to infiltrate and replace the Macedonian leadership, the Greek leadership in the CPG, GNLF and NLAG began a propaganda campaign labeling the Macedonians “autonomists”. In the eyes of the Greek population this was supposed to mean that the Macedonians had a hidden agenda interpreted as anti-Greek. Besides being afraid that they may lose Macedonia, the CPG, GNLF and NLAG leadership knew very well that its source of NLAG recruits and supplies would dry up very quickly without the Macedonians. The real drive behind the resistance movement in Greece was in Greek occupied Macedonia and it was fuelled by the Macedonian people. The CPG, GNLF and NLAG leadership was well aware of this and knew it had absolutely no chance of success without the protection of the Macedonian mountains and surrounding villages capable of supplying not only fighters but an inexhaustible source of food. Without Macedonian support the struggle would be starved in no time. So rather than making a big fuss the CPG, GNLF and NLAG leadership decided to allow the Kostur detachment to continue to recruit while new and more sinister strategies were planned.

But as mobilization into the Lazo Trpovski detachment became more massive than ever anticipated, especially from the village Koreshchata, the Greek side had to act quickly. Having no other course of friction to complain about, the Greek side started to show dissatisfaction with the symbols Macedonians wore on their hats. Having chosen to wear a star on their hats was cause enough for the Greek leadership of NLAG to complain thus accusing the Macedonians of being more interested in nationalistic principles than in the struggle to free Greece from the occupier. Even though the Macedonians did have cause to rise up against the Greeks this was not their intention. The Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia firmly believed in the principles that after the conflict they would gain their rights as Macedonians inside Greece.

In spite of their disagreements with the Greek progressives, the Macedonians were instrumental in the resistance struggle, especially in rallying the people to strike against high prices and the black market. More than 10,000 workers participated in a strike in Voden, 8,000 in Edindzhe-Vardar and surrounding region and 5,000 in Gumendzhe. In August 1943 a massive rally was organized in Lerin Region where more than 15,000 demonstrators were in attendance. These were vast numbers for small cities and towns where the population was no more than 10 to 30 thousand. Strikes and demonstrations were also held in Kostur and Rupishta where a large part of the population attended. More than 20,000 attended a rally in the city square in Subotsko in November 1943 when residents from the entire surrounding region came together carrying black flags and banners demonstrating their discontent with the economic situation.

The most massive demonstrations however were conducted against the Bulgarians when their occupying army crossed south of the Struma River. Thirty thousand people gathered together in the city of Nigrita to show their displeasure. There were also demonstrations organized in Solun, Negush and Ber where people, mostly workers, attended in large numbers. These demonstrations were a clear message not only to the occupiers but also to the Greek authorities on both the right and left side that Macedonians were capable of defending themselves. Unfortunately this show of strength, instead of bringing improvement, brought more misery to the Macedonian people as all sides began to persecute the Macedonians, especially after Italy's capitulation on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1943.

## **An all Macedonian National Liberation Front**

The Macedonian national liberation movement in the Republic of Macedonia was carefully followed not only by the Macedonians living in Greek occupied Macedonia but also by the leadership of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG), the Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF) and the National Liberation Army of Greece (NLAG). They were all impressed with its achievements not only as a National Liberation Movement but as a clearly all Macedonian national movement with its own general headquarters, Macedonian officers and an all Macedonian army of Partisans with their own flag and symbols and with the Macedonian language as the language of command. This was in sharp contrast to the practices of the Greeks where Macedonian units were mistrusted and always officered by Greeks. Macedonian fighters who put their lives on the line and fought for the liberation of Greece were treated no better than Macedonian civilians who were excluded from state posts, higher education, promotions in the army and so on.

There was however a need to draw the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia into the democratically-led resistance movements in the Balkans which could only be achieved through offers of incentives like equal rights and self determination. Unfortunately the Greeks did not agree with such offers and on June 20, 1943 voiced their reluctance during a high-level meeting with the central committees of the Albanian, Greek and Yugoslav parties. Here the Greek delegate, Tilemachos Ververis, rejected all such proposals and argued that the mere raising of the Macedonian question in Greece would alienate Greeks from the CPG and GNLF-NLAG.

Since the Greeks were so mistrustful of the Macedonians and vice versa, their interests could not be easily reconciled and the CPG leadership continued to manipulate the Macedonians to further its own party interests. Whenever the CPG needed political or military support from the Macedonians it paid lip service to their demands and made some half-hearted concessions to them without giving up control over them or their movement. Then when the CPG no longer felt it needed their support it turned against them, canceled the concessions, and downplayed their demands and problems.

Influenced by their counterparts in the Republic of Macedonia and being mistrustful of the Greek GNLF-NLAG leadership, the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia started their own Macedonian National Liberation movement. As a result, the Macedonian National Liberation Front in Greece (MNLFG) was founded in the fall of 1943.

Mistrustful as they were the CPG and the GNLF-NLAG leadership had no choice but to sanction the MNLFG because in 1943 the GNLF-NLAG started having its own problems with the smaller nationalist resistance

organizations in Greece (EDES and others) and needed the Macedonian people's help. The Greek communists were compelled to court the Macedonians in order to draw them away from Bulgarian influence and into the ranks of NLAG. Even though MNLF(G) was a Macedonian organization it was still placed under the direct authority of GNLF-NLAG.

The MNLF(G) came into being as a result of a three year Macedonian struggle not just against the occupiers (Germans, Italians and Bulgarians and their Greek quislings) but also against the Greek right and to some extent against the Greek left. I am including the Greek left because many Greek officers from the GNLF-NLAG were a product of the Greek educational system; especially Metaxas's indoctrinations where they were taught that Macedonians, or the "Vulgari" as they liked to call them, were dangerous and not be trusted and therefore should be hated.

In view of the terror due to the rise in power of the various right oriented anti-Macedonian groups, such as the IVE (Defense of Northern Greece), PAO (All Greek Liberation Organization), EKA (National and Social Revival) and others, which represented an open danger to the resistance movements, the Macedonian people had no choice but to organize and defend themselves. Some Greek rightists unfortunately could not stomach a Macedonian organization and immediately began to criticize it calling it autonomous and separatist and therefore anti-Greek. If anything at all, this Macedonian organization was an expression of the timeless Macedonian desire to achieve its national goals and national ideals in a mutual struggle with the Greek people. For better or for worse this was the view the Macedonian leadership had at the time. Nonetheless Macedonian loyalty to Greece was not enough to appease the Greek nationalists who wished the Macedonians ill will. But having no choice in the matter the best the rightists could do is criticize. The CPG too was criticized being called a sellout and a traitor to the Greek people for courting the Macedonians. The nationalist Greeks needed excuses to slander the resistance organizations to justify their own absence from the anti-fascist front and to validate their own collaboration with the occupiers. It was the right, not the left, that collaborated with the enemy as attested to by the Greek professor P. Enepekidis of the University of Vienna in his article "The secret archives of Vermaht" published by "To Vima" newspaper in 1963 where the professor stated that a pile of authentic documents were discovered testifying to the effect that various right oriented organizations and people collaborated with the occupier.

At the same time the Bulgarians were also in the thick of things promoting the illusion that a Bulgarian "liberation mission" was working under the slogan "Autonomy for Macedonia" in hopes of attracting Macedonians away from the resistance movement. Under these circumstances the regional committee for Macedonia had no alternative

but to take the problem to the Macedonian people and organize its own Liberation Front, the MNLF(G).

There is a lot of talk, especially from the Greek side, that the MNLF(G) was heavily influenced by its Macedonian counterpart in Yugoslavia and as a result conclusions were drawn that there was some sort of “secret plan” for the two organizations to join forces and fight for the reunification of Macedonia. But sources on the ground like Naum Pejov and Hristo Andonovski did not support that idea and in fact went a step further accusing the mistrustful Greeks of starting such rumours in order to keep a tight leash on the MNLF(G).

The formation of the MNLF(G) in Kostur and Lerin Regions in October 1943 was done along the same lines of the formation of IMRO-United in 1936 and had an immediate and successful following. Among the leaders of the Lerin Region branch were Kiro Piljaev and Stavro Kochevski and among those in the Kostur Region were Paskal Mitrevski, Naum Pejov, Lazo Poplazarov and Lazo Damovski Osenski. The immediate aims of the organization were to disarm the villagers who had been armed by the occupier and to persuade them to join the MNLF(G). After a successful campaign 110 members from the village Eksisu alone joined the MNLF(G) and donated money to publish the necessary literature to advertise the MNLF(G)’s objectives.

In September 1943 Tanos, the CPG’s political secretary for the Regional Committee of Lerin Region, called a meeting with the Macedonian leaders Kiro Piljaev, Gijorgij Turundzhov, Stavro Kochevski, Trifko Popovski and Vangel Kojchev. The meeting was held in the village Banitsa. Stavro Kochevski, Kiro Paljaev and Gijorgij Turundzhov were selected to jointly lead the MNLF(G) along with the GNLF regional committee. Kiro Paljaev was assigned the task of political secretary and Gijorgij Turundzhov was assigned the task of organizational secretary.

MNLF(G)’s first objective was to organize its first publication in the Macedonian language for which it needed a typewriter with Cyrillic characters. Unfortunately there was no such typewriter in Greek occupied Macedonia so Gijorgij Turundzhov with his brother Ilija and Gijorgij Bukchev took a trip to Bitola to look for one. There they made contact with Krum Hololchev who took them to the village Novatsi but were unable to find such a machine. The next day it had occurred to someone that banks use typewriters and with the help of their Bitola contacts the trio entered a bank, stole a typewriter and some paper and walked away. The next day Bulgarian authorities arrived and arrested and jailed seven bank employees. When they counted the money and found none was missing they took inventory of other items and found that a typewriter had disappeared. They realized that such a machine would be needed for propaganda purposes and concluded that it was communists who stole it, probably with help from the bank staff.

When the Macedonians returned to their headquarters with the typewriter they realized they had no ribbon and had to fashion one from homemade materials. Using their newly acquired typewriter they were able to produce the first edition of an all Macedonian publication called “Sloboda” (Freedom). Then by using these publications the Macedonians in Lerin Region were rallied behind the all Macedonian MNLF(G). Despite Greek attempts to downplay the strength of this organization, it managed to draw massive support especially during its regional conference in February 1944 held in the village Bapchor in Vicho Mountain. Many Macedonians attended this conference and gave the MNLF(G) their support by demonstrating their wish to fight for equality and for a common cause together shoulder to shoulder with the Greek democratic people.

Soon after the Lerin and Kostur branches of the MNLF(G) were established, another branch appeared in Voden Region. This branch it seemed had little objection from the CPG and at first was widely accepted.

The first objective of this branch of the MNLF(G) was to establish its presence inside the city of Voden and then quickly spread out to Voden and Meglen Regions. Soon after its consolidation, this branch too started its own newspaper called “Trvena Zsvezda” (Red Star) in the Macedonian language but using the Greek alphabet. Even though the publication was only used to rally the people in support of the resistance and sometimes to disseminate news from the military operations in the allied fronts, it was still disturbing the Greeks. According to Vangel Aljanov, one of the leaders in the MNLF(G), the Greeks were concerned about its content and how it might wrongly be interpreted by the Macedonian people. Both the CPG and GNLf leadership began to object not only to what was published but to the publication itself. Then when the Red Star began to run a series of important articles in support of Macedonian national rights, the CPG and GNLf regional committee ordered the publisher to stop publishing. According to their explanations, in their view this kind of information was deemed dangerous and would lead to the destruction of the Greek nation.

In the fall of 1943 another Macedonian language newspaper came into existence. Located in Meglen Region this newspaper was called “Iskra” (Spark) and was an offshoot of the CPG’s newspaper called “Flora”. Unfortunately after its third publication it too was ordered to shut down. The CPG regional committee decided it was unnecessary to have another paper while Flora was still in existence.

While the MNLF(G) was tormented by the CPG and GNLf from the inside, the CPG was telling different stories on the outside. The Greek newspaper “Laikon Vima”, closely associated with the CPG, on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1944, among other thing, heralded the birth of the MNLF(G) as a necessary step in the ripening political process and the MNLF(G) itself was seen as a “Liberation Front” for the Macedonians similar to the GNLf for the Greeks. The MNLF(G) was heralded as an instrument that would

lead the Macedonians in a brotherly struggle together with the Greeks for the realization of combined aims.

Another newspaper, the “Efedrikos ELAS” closely associated with the divisional command of the NLAG reservists for Western Greek occupied Macedonia, on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 wrote something to the effect that the GNLF and the MNLF(G) are organizations dedicated to the struggle for the same aims, the same desires and aspirations. Greeks and Macedonians firmly united will take decisive steps for the realization of the people’s needs. On the occasion of the Macedonian participation in the MNLF(G) in Lerin and Kostur Regions, “Efedrikos ELAS” emphasized the importance of the massive Macedonian contribution in the struggle against the occupier in spite of the dangers, terror and difficult conditions. In regards to the first NLAG reservist conference, the newspaper added that the Macedonians from Lerin and Kostur Regions are represented by a considerable number of delegates which clearly indicates that the Macedonians are convinced that their aims are just in this all national struggle.

Six months after the formation of the MNLF(G) its success and ability to mobilize the Macedonian people was echoed by the Macedonian newspaper “Makedonski Glas” (Macedonian Voice) on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1944. Among other things it wrote that the MNLF(G) is a united peoples’ liberation organization which strives to fulfill the national needs of the Macedonian people. The MNLF(G) is the new IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) of the Macedonians which will bring to fruition the deeds of the Ilinden Revolutionaries. In response to the slanderous accusations that MNLF(G) is an autonomist organization “Macedonian Voice” fought back by saying that the true autonomists are the Fascists who want to enslave our people. The MNLF(G) is a continuation of IMRO born from the people’s aspiration for freedom which will struggle to drive out the occupier and clean up the collaborators and traitors and all those whose aims are to bring tyranny to our people.

In the six months since its formation the MNLF(G) distinguished itself as a true leader of the Macedonian people. Since its appearance in the Kostur Region people came alive as they did during the old legendary Ilinden revolutionary days. All the villages armed by the occupiers one by one surrendered their arms and voluntarily joined the ranks of the MNLF(G). The Macedonian people trusted the MNLF(G) leaders because they spoke Macedonian, the mother language of the Macedonian people, which proved to be a great unifier for the MNLF(G). The Macedonian language was also the worst weapon against Fascism because it earnestly spoke to the Macedonian people on all sides of the conflict and warned them of the dangers to come. “Fascism is on its last leg, the Red Army is in Romania and Czechoslovakia and soon it will start its offensive to free the Balkans. This is your last chance to save yourselves by surrendering

your arms and by joining us. We will guaranty your safety we give you our word. If you don't surrender now you will become victims of NLAG when it conducts its cleanup operations. If you don't give up your arms now we can't help you at all later because then you will be considered to be the enemy. We are your brothers and sisters and are concerned about the final outcome of the struggle. We are concerned for the good of the Macedonian people. We strive to achieve the aims of Ilinden and with your help we can write more pages for our celebrated history. Do not let the enemy extinguish it. Also do not listen to those who want to block you from taking a step in the right direction.”

In the first six months alone the MNLFG drew support from over 6,000 people of whom 1834 were women. Naturally Macedonia has a long standing tradition of fighting women like Sirma, Irina, Gjurgja and others who picked up arms and courageously stood up to the Ottomans in the heat of the Ilinden Uprising. With rifles in hand some lead groups of men into battle while many toiled to support the revolution by gathering food, washing and mending clothes, smuggling and transporting guns and ammunition and most importantly nursing the wounded and burying the dead.

The Greeks were not the only ones alarmed by the MNLFG's rapid success. To capitalize on the euphoria and slow down the growth of the Macedonian resistance movement, the Bulgarian Fascists, through Kalchev and other Vancho-Mihailovist agents, attempted to form their own base in Kostur. The MNLFG however with its publications and its own propaganda campaign was able to quickly and successfully disarm the Fascists. The MNLFG appealed to the Macedonian people who were under Greek and Bulgarian influence and helped them see beyond the assimilatory propaganda which obscured their national consciousness.

The MNLFG was a beacon of guiding light for the Macedonian people which not only showed them who they were but convinced them that there was a way they could live free and as equals to the other free people in the Balkans. The MNLFG reintroduced the Macedonian language to the people and again gave them their own voice which they proudly expressed in plays, newspaper articles, educational programs and schools for their children. For the first time inside Greek occupied Macedonia, the Macedonian people were free to celebrate their own holidays including Ilinden and other Macedonian national events.

The MNLFG was not just another political tool that lead the Macedonian people in the struggle against the occupier. It was also a caretaker and provider for the people striving to improve their lives. One of its objectives was to stamp out famine by providing food and other goods like sugar, oil, soap and other products to the needy. Depots were set up in the city of Kostur where villagers were invited to visit and pick up food and other items for their families. This by the way was nothing

new for the Macedonian people. Macedonians have a tradition of helping each other especially in the worst of times. The success of the food drive was heralded on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1944 in a letter from the regional council to Poptrajkov, the leader of the MNLF(G), in which among other things the council informed Poptrajkov that as a result of the massive protests organized by the MNLF(G) the villagers from Breshteni succeeded in receiving over a thousand kilos of beans and about fifty kilos of sugar while the people of Drenovo received over six-hundred kilos of beans and got back their personal identification cards which were earlier confiscated. The people of Dobrolishta too were given an undetermined amount of beans as well.

The MNLF(G) also rewarded its volunteer fighters with various incentives like providing their families with free labour to harvest the crops at the family farm, paying medical bills for family members and acting as an advocate and judge in village disputes.

The Macedonian people could see results in the MNLF(G)'s work so they gave it massive support not only by participating in demonstrations and protests but also by joining its military wing as volunteer fighters. Volunteer youths kept pouring in insisting that they join youth groups and be inducted in the NLAG reserves.

The MNLF(G)'s popularity unfortunately created some uneasiness among its Greek counterpart and as Macedonians tried to open new branches they found stiff resistance from the Greek leadership. "I tried to start an organization in the villages Chuka and Stena but Joannis Papadopoulos stopped me and asked me if I had permission to do this. I said I didn't so he suggested that I stop what I was doing or I would be punished. He suggested that I go to the CPG regional office and ask for permission from the committee by making a request in writing." This quote is part of a document found in Lazo Damovski's personal archives which demonstrates the kind of tactics the leftist Greeks employed to stifle the Macedonian movement.

The MNLF(G) harnessed its power from a small number of villages where it was established and drew more than 500 Macedonians in the ranks of NLAG and about twice as many in the ranks of the reservists. Proportionally Macedonian participation in MNLF(G) especially in Kostur Region compared to the Greeks was massive. Wherever MNLF(G) existed the enemy had difficulties penetrating as attested by an article written by Kolcho, a regional MNLF(G) leader, on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1944. "I have nine villages in my ward seven of which are under MNLF(G) jurisdiction. We have not yet penetrated Blatsa and Setoma because they are still enemy strongholds. The seven villages that are on our side have accepted MNLF(G) as their organization and 200 people have already joined us. There is however mistrust for the Greeks and many believe that they will again lie to us through their propaganda. With the exception of Blatsa,

Setoma and Chereshnitsa, the Bulgarophil element here is very small.” (The original document from which this quote was obtained can be found in Lazo Damovski’s archives.)

The MNLF(G) demonstrated its popularity with the Macedonian people during its regional conference on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1944 in the village Dmbeni when massive numbers of Macedonians showed up making it look more like a religious holiday than a conference. The conference was a smashing success and a milestone for the Macedonian peoples’ movement in Kostur Region. Besides lifting the spirits of the Macedonian people this conference was instrumental in exposing the occupier and Greek right’s intrigues and propaganda aimed against the MNLF(G). Clearly this propaganda was aimed to divide the Macedonian people by offering them to join a non existent “autonomous movement”. This very same propaganda was later used by the Greeks to discredit the MNLF(G) and its leadership accusing them of harbouring hidden autonomous aims.

In addition to a crowd of onlookers, over 500 delegates from the various MNLF(G) regions attended the conference with guests from the CPG, GNLF and NLAG and even delegates from the British War mission in free Greece. Lazo Damovski, the MNLF(G)’s political secretary, presented an essay on regional issues and his recommendations for action. Paskal Mitovski, the MNLF(G)’s organizational secretary, presented his views on the organizational situation in the ward and Rigas (Kostas Sidiropulos), the GNLF representative for Western Macedonia, spoke about the GNLF-MNLF(G)’s joint military and political situation with regards to the overall resistance movement in Greece. A good portion of the conference was dedicated to sorting out the relationship between NLAG the joint military wing and the MNLF(G).

According to a copy of the conference minutes found in Lazo Damovski’s archives, the following people belonged to the MNLF(G) in the newly formed ward: Lazo Damovski, Paskal Mitrevski, Andon Kalcho, Blagoj Panduli, Kokinos, Peev Naum, Boshko Hadzhiev, Evdokia Baleva, Shishkov, Gulev, Moskov, Poptrajkov, Vasilka Galeva, Hrisanta Chocheva, Risto Dimitriev, Karadzhev, Kalimanov, Pandeli and Ljuba Balsamova.

A special telegram was sent from the conference to its partners in the GNLF and the 9<sup>th</sup> division of NLAG expressing satisfaction with events that had transpired, re-enforcing the idea that it was a good decision to allow the formation of the MNLF(G) and temporarily quelling slanders from reactionary groups accusing the MNLF(G) of being some sort of “autonomist organization”. Among other things the telegram also said: “We the five-hundred delegates of MNLF(G), Kostur Region, in our first historic conference are full of enthusiasm and from the bottom of our hearts salute our National Liberation political committee and stand shoulder to shoulder with all our forces in the formation of a government

of national unity. We are convinced that in one peoples democratic Greece we Macedonians will find absolute social, political and economic equality together with the Greeks.”

Unfortunately while the Macedonians in Kostur region were optimistic about their involvement with their Greek partners the same could not be said about the Macedonians in Voden Region who in April of 1944 were struggling to form a new MNLFG ward in Voden. When it came to discussing what symbols the Macedonian fighters should wear on their uniforms, the Greeks in the regional committee of the detachment insisted that they wear the “hammer and sickle” and be called the “Communist Army”. The Macedonians on the other hand insisted that the fighters be called the “Macedonian Army” and use the Macedonian flag as their emblem.

By pushing these recommendations the Greeks were hoping to either slow down or completely suppress the growth of the MNLFG. If Macedonians were to agree to Greek demands, Macedonian fighters would refuse to enlist in what to them would appear as a strange organization. If the Macedonians were to disagree with Greek demands then the Greeks would certainly be given an excuse to label the Macedonians “autonomists” and “separatists”.

In spite of Greek objections the MNLFG, a modest Macedonian version and satellite of the GNLFG that the CPG conceded to recognize, won immediate acceptance and widespread support among the Macedonians. Paradoxically though it was this very success that sealed its fate. The CPG wanted an obedient and subservient, token Macedonian instrument to draw the Macedonians into the fold of GNLFG-NLAG and thus away from the various "free" and "autonomous" Macedonian bands supported by the Bulgarians and Germans. The CPG was not willing to tolerate, let alone accept as a partner, an authentic Macedonian national liberation movement on the Left that enjoyed a popular mass following and thus an independent power base. Consequently, from the very outset, while the movement was still in its organizational stage, the CPG party leadership severely curtailed its independence, restricting and hindering its activities. And in the end, after existing for only seven months, the MNLFG was suppressed in May 1944. Some of its leaders were arrested, but a group of partisans led by Naum Pejov fled across the border and joined the Macedonian army in the Republic of Macedonia.

## **Break up of the Macedonian National Liberation Front**

By now it was obvious to every Macedonian that the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) was not going to tolerate a strong all Macedonian organization inside Greece. The CPG had never approved of the MNLF(G) and now that the MNLF(G) was getting stronger and more popular with the Macedonian people, the CPG felt it had to do something. Although it needed the Macedonian people to fight on its side, the CPG at this time was also trying to warm up to the Greek bourgeois parties. Unfortunately none of the Greek bourgeois parties approved of the CPG's recognition of the Macedonian ethnicity so the CPG was in a dilemma. It had two choices; placate the bourgeois parties by disassociating itself from the Macedonians or forget about creating unity and humour the Macedonians for as long as they were needed.

The CPG desperately and at all costs wanted "national unity" with the other Greek parties and was willing to do anything, even sacrifice the MNLF(G) if necessary.

The CPG chose "unity" over the Macedonians and did not only disassociate itself from them, it took action to dismantle the MNLF(G) and effectively took away all the rights the Macedonians had recently earned including the right to form their own organizations, the right to form peoples' liberation councils and the right to have Macedonian schools.

During the MNLF(G) regional conference held on April 12, 1944 Greek representatives of the CPG and GNLf were very pleased with the MNLF(G)'s recent successes but a few days later the same Greeks suddenly and unexpectedly denounced the MNLF(G) calling it a redundant and useless organization demanding that it be dismantled and its fighters be merged with the GNLf. They argued that "two organizations with the same aims were not needed" and "national unity could not possibly be achieved by having redundant organizations".

In the beginning of May 1944, during a CPG conference held in the village Mogila, Kostur Region, a final decision was made to break up the MNLF(G). A similar decision was also made during a conference held in the village Lagen, Lerin Region and another one in the Macedonian ward in Voden.

Naturally and justifiably the Macedonian people found it hard to accept this especially since Macedonians created this organization through struggle and personal sacrifice.

The fact that the Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia were having their own organizations, their own army, their own general headquarters and their recognized right to separate as an ethnic Macedonian identity made the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia feel like they were taking steps backwards. Besides being stripped of their right to be recognized as an ethnic Macedonian identity in Greece, these

Macedonians began to lose everything they had worked for, even the rights they had achieved thus far. This was not only unacceptable, it was incomprehensible.

In addition to breaking up the MNLFG's political body, the CPG-GNLF leadership also disbanded its fighters and forced them to join NLAG. This was not what Macedonians wanted and naturally created negative feelings towards the Greeks which did not go unnoticed by the Fascists and directly fueled the autonomist propaganda which began to work hard to attract these disgruntled Macedonians who found themselves robbed not only of their rights but of also of their dignity.

The kind of politics the CPG was conducting was neither new nor unknown to the Macedonian leadership. As early as January 1944 Lazo Damovski, the secretary of the regional council of the MNLFG for Kostur Region, addressed the CPG council for Macedonia and warned of this. On January 24, 1944 Damovski wrote: "The conditions created by World War II for the liberation movements in all of occupied Europe including the Balkans have opened new roads for the self-determination of all people. Macedonians are no exception. Macedonians have spilled blood in the 1903 Ilinden Uprising and are now fighting, spilling blood and making sacrifices to gain their freedom from the Fascists. Our friends in Vardar Macedonia are going in the right direction..."

"The Macedonians in Lerin and Kostur Regions represent the majority of the population (70%) and are fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Greek people. When they become liberated, will they, according to the Atlantic agreements, have the rights to self declare? Will they be granted the promised rights?"

"The CPG promised the Macedonian people equal rights within the framework of a Peoples Republic of Greece, the same way it promised the people of the Dodekanis and Cyprus. If the CPG is serious about delivering on those promises when will it then allow the Macedonian people to freely express their ethnic culture? When will it let the Macedonians fight for their own ideals and for composing something unique to show that they are truly Macedonians? Is the CPG really afraid of being criticized by the chauvinist elements? If so, how then does it propose to form "national unity" and not receive any criticism? Does the CPG truly understand the Macedonian question? Because if it doesn't it better learn it fast and start facing reality and make the right decision..."

One by one the CPG ordered all regional MNLFG wards to close down and all fighters to disband and join the ranks of NLAG. This however was not what the Macedonians wanted and some began to show dissatisfaction.

In May 1944 a large group of Macedonian fighters and activists lead by Naum Pejov, separated themselves from NLAG in a symbolic protest against the dismantling of the MNLFG. Ilija Dimovski – Gotse too was

suspended from duty because he was in support of this separation. Similar events also took place in Lerin Region where a group of Macedonian fighters lead by Gjorgij Turundzhov fled NLAG. Another group from Voden Region also fled but their leader Vangel Ajanov, who insisted on forming Macedonian detachments, was caught, put in jail and taken away to Mount Pajak. Pursued by Greek communist forces most of these renegade groups crossed over the Yugoslav border and fled into the Republic of Macedonia.

These acts of protest demonstrated by the Macedonians were neither forgiven nor forgotten by the CPG-GNLF-NLAG leaderships. The Greek communists immediately issued orders to hunt down, capture and punish these renegades. Captured and jailed were Lazo Damovski, Paskal Mitrevski and Lazo Poplazov from Kostur region. In a disgraceful manner killed at Kajmakchalan were Macedonian ward leaders Pando Dzhikov, Dimitar Leskov from Ostrov Region, ten people from the village Chegan and three more from the village Rusilovo.

The CPG made no effort to explain why these people were killed or to justify its action or to take responsibility for its part in the destruction of the MNLFG which propagated these demonstrations in the first place. Instead it took the easy way out and accused these people of subversion and of creating “division” among the Macedonians in Greek occupied Macedonia by allegedly spreading “autonomous ideas” to the population. In other words the CPG lied its way out by accusing the Macedonians of wanting to split away from Greece. Greeks have this inherent and primordial fear that the Macedonians one day will take away their precious part of Macedonia. I wonder why?

After the fleeing fighters from Greek occupied Macedonia crossed over to the Republic of Macedonia they joined the resistance movement there. The CPG however was not at all pleased with their action and demanded that they be immediately sent back to Greece. While the fighters explained their reasons for leaving, the CPG insisted that they were “deserters” and needed to be sent back so that “an example” could be made of them. Without bothering to explain the underlying reasons why these fighters fled Greece the CPG took their case to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and adamantly insisted that the fighters be immediately returned. The CPY however did not give in to the CPG’s demands and used this opportunity to put pressure on the CPG to deliver on its promises to the Macedonian people. Further, the CPY recommended that if the CPG wanted its fighters back it would have to allow them to form their own Macedonian military units in Voden, Lerin and Kostur regions.

Here is what Koliopoulos had to say about this: “A contemporary Partisan view adds another side to the issue. 'The friction between our bands and the Greek Antartes in the region of Kastoria and Florina,'

Tempo and Ortche wrote in one of their reports to the Partisan GHQ in August 1944, 'has been caused by the Greek Antartes, when they moved into the region and started pressing Macedonians into their units. The Macedonians, according to their leaders, maintained that they were prepared to fight the Germans, but that they waited for their own units to be formed so as to enlist in them. The Greeks did not approve [the formation of the units] and instead started oppressing the Macedonian people. The result was an exodus of the Macedonians in the direction of Monastir, where Michailov waited to press them into his own units and fight against the Greeks. Faced with this situation, our political commissars let the fugitives, after consulting Radosavljevich, form their own units in the Florina-Monastir area of operations. Some of our commissars then started spreading the idea that the Macedonians could enlist in our army and that service with us would be as if they were serving in the Greek army, since both we and the Greeks are fighting against the fascist conquerors. At this point the Macedonians started enlisting in our army en masse, and the Greeks intensified their pressure on the Macedonians. The commanders of the Antartes issued orders for the confiscation of the property of those who enlisted in our army, and this caused confusion. In the talks conducted by Radosavljevich, a member of the KKE (CPG) Macedonian Bureau said that it was preferable for the Macedonians to be on the side of the Germans than on our [the Yugoslav]. The Greeks in general appear to share this view. Our representatives pressed the Greeks to accept the formation of a Kastoria-Florina battalion, but they are opposed. We are convinced that the Greeks must somehow find a way to form such a battalion. If they don't, we'll have to form it ourselves, in which case we'll clash with the Greeks.'" (John S. Koliopoulos. "Plundered Loyalties". Pages 127-128)

Ortse Dobrivoje Radosavljevich, mentioned above, wrote a letter to the Macedonian units from Greek occupied Macedonia, then serving in the Republic of Macedonia, which was read at a CPG regional conference. Among other things the letter said that time for discussions of whether or not to form Macedonian units or what symbols these units should be wearing, is over. The enemy is well aware of the situation with the Macedonian people and is using their dissatisfaction and mistrust to draw them into its ranks under the slogan "independent Macedonia". The idea of an "independent Macedonia" was not a Macedonian creation but an enemy invention to draw the Macedonians on its side just like it is attempting to draw in the Romano-Vlachs from Pindos by promising them a Vlach state and the Shiptars with promises of creating a greater Albania.

The idea of creating a united and independent Macedonia was nothing new. It was contemplated by the Italians and supported by the Americans in 1919. Even Britain had agreed to create an independent Macedonian protectorate. Hitler too had toyed with the idea of an "independent

Macedonia” with Solun as its capital. Here is what Walter Hagen had to say about that: “Hitler’s interest in Macedonia began in 1941. Then in 1943 he received a memo from his secret service drawing his attention to the benefits of forming an independent Macedonian state with Solun as its capital. Creating such a state would be loyal to Germany and through it Germany would have access to the Aegean waters. Such a state could have easily been created in 1943 but by 1944 it was too late. Germany worked through Vancho Mihailov who came to Macedonia to familiarize the people with this German idea but concluded that it was too late and by then very difficult to realize it.” (Hristo Andonovski “Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija”, Page 127)

Vancho Mihailov in his book “Macedonia - Switzerland of the Balkans” wrote that the Germans and the Bulgarians were considering creating an autonomous Macedonian state. Also from what we can gather from Kalchev’s and Dimchev’s propaganda Bulgaria, around the middle of June, also began to arm Macedonians bands in Voden Region for the purpose of creating an autonomous Macedonia. Again according to Bulgarian propaganda, the idea for the formation of the “Ohrana”, a Bulgarian sponsored military organization stationed in Voden and operating jointly with the Germans, was to arm Macedonian bands for the purpose of creating an “autonomous” Macedonian state. If the Macedonians truly wanted that, wouldn’t they have joined the Ohrana or cooperated with the Germans to achieve it?

Even after the Greek communists dismantled the MNLF(G) and upset the Macedonian population, the best the Ohrana could attract was 700 fighters. The majority of Macedonians judged the Ohrana by the unruly individuals it attracted who were viewed as no better than common criminals and who enjoyed terrorizing the population. One of the schools in Voden was converted to an Ohrana torture chamber to torture not the Fascist Greeks but the patriotic Macedonians and progressive Greeks. The following individuals were killed by the Ohrana in Voden; the pensioner major Atanasoglu, Siganidis, Georgios, Ipokratis, Aspalidis, the teacher Lazaros Vafiadis, Karavasilis, Vasilios, Nasko Pechinarov, Georgios Akritidis, Stavridis Kariofilis and others. The Ohrana didn’t just target individuals, it also targeted resistance organizations. Among the Macedonian organizations to successfully fight back against the Ohrana was the group of saboteurs from Voden. Members of that group included Hristo Kardalov, Aleko Tsrvenkata, Tushi Keramitchev, the brothers Gjasherev, Hristo Pochevov and Leonida Projov.

Whether coincidental or not, right after the Greek communists broke up the MNLF(G) some Macedonians did join the Ohrana but instead of offering them a diplomatic way out, the leadership of NLAG, proficient in well known Greek tactics, ordered the burning of the houses of those who had joined. This totally illogical act not only did not stop people from

joining, it forced more people to arm themselves for their defense. Common sense however must have prevailed because the CPG decided that in order to stop the drift to the Ohrana the people needed a better alternative. The CPG did that by creating separate Macedonian units within the framework of NLAG. As a result, the regional council of the CPG for Macedonia ordered the formation of Macedonian units in Voden, Lerin and Kostur Regions. I just want to point out at this point that there may have been other reasons why the CPG decided to create Macedonian units. In its attempt to burn down the houses in the village Javorjani, NLAG was repelled several times by the armed group there and was unable to carry out its mission. This must have prompted the Greek communists to change tactics. It would have been disastrous for the communist Greeks to fight against the Macedonians so they no doubt reluctantly chose to again befriend them.

Even though the decision to form Macedonian units within NLAG appeared to be a done deal for the Macedonians there were disagreements among the Greek communists and the decision was not supported by everyone, especially after the Lebanon Conference.

The Greek resistance leadership signed an agreement on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944 in Lebanon to form a coalition government with other civilian parties from Greece which was unwelcome to the Macedonians. The agreement was viewed with suspicion because much of its content was insulting and demeaning to the Macedonian people. The agreement called for disarming the Macedonian people and was interpreted as a means to destroy the MNLFG. The Lebanon agreement was the end result of the so called “national unity” with other Greek parties which the CPG so desperately desired to create.

In order to patch up relations with the Macedonians, a conference was held in the village Belkamen, Lerin Region on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944 which was attended by the Partisans active in Vicho and Western Kajmakchalan. One of the resolutions reached was the re-organization of the Partisan forces into three detachments. The first lead by Aetos was assigned to operate in Vicho, the second lead by Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was assigned to Bigla – Koreshtata and the third was ordered to go to Western Kajmakchalan. In August 1943 Hristo Kolentsev was appointed detachment commissar for Vicho, replacing Commissar Naum Shupurkovski – Leon who left for a new assignment.

The moment the Macedonians in Voden Region found out that the CPG had reached a decision to allow the formation of Macedonian detachments they began to work. Then on July 16, 1944 they announced the formation of the Macedonian Voden battalion at Kajmakchalan. The announcement was welcome news for the Macedonian youth who began to arrive in massive numbers to join as volunteers. The battalion was camped above the village Gorno Rodivo in Kajmakchalan and every day more than

a dozen youths came from the local villages with a single desire, to be soldiers in the Macedonian army.

This kind of movement was unprecedented in the history of the region as youths poured in from the Meglen, Baovo and Pozhartsko Region villages. Besides arriving in large numbers most of them brought their own arms and ammunition.

As soon as the Macedonians in Voden organized they addressed the Macedonian people with the following proclamation written in the Macedonian language:

“Brothers, wake up and understand that this struggle is not a struggle between Greeks and Bulgarians, it is not a fight between Bulgarians and Serbians here in the Balkans, it is a fight everywhere between the people and Fascism. United with the Red army all the people everywhere are locked in a war of life and death against the tyrannical Fascists. As long as German Fascism is strong and until Italian Fascism is still alive, the forces of the people here in the Balkans will fight against them. Until the Fascist hordes are destroyed at the front, the German fascists here will continue to attract Macedonian youths to their camp through the lies of their servant Fascist dogs Kalchev, Dimchev and others like them.

Our Macedonian peoples’ army along with the Greek peoples’ army are now fighting together against a common foe the German and Greek fascists and against out boys who have been lied to.

The Greek fascists, the Greek royalists; we know what they are fighting for... And our boys who have been lied to by Kalchev, Dimchev and others, united with the Greek gendarmes under German fascism are fighting not for Macedonia but for the Fascists against the Macedonian peoples’ army, and against the Macedonian people.

Macedonia people!

Our way is not with the fascists. Only together with the Greek people here and with the other progressive people can we gain life fit for humans and lasting peace.

Know that Fascism will soon die... The Italian people rose against it. The Romanian people did the same. The Czechoslovakian, the French, the Fin and the Bulgarian people did the same...

Sons of Macedonia!

Come forth and join the ranks of the Macedonian army against fascism. Unite with the Macedonian peoples’ army; with the Greek people, against the tyrannical fascists against the Greek fascists and against all fascists.” (Hristo Andonovski “Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija”, Pages 129-130)

Within a few days of distributing this publication the first Cheta was created with Petar Tanirov as its commander and Parikli Jovchev as its commissar. As soon as the Cheta was put together it was dispatched on missions to battle German and Greek Fascist bands in Enidzhe Vardar,

Kria Vrasi (Plasnichevo) in Solun Region and with other bands in Kukush Region. The Cheta proved itself in combat showing exemplary heroism and self reliance.

With the formation of the Macedonian Cheta in Voden Region, many Macedonians who had joined the Ohrana felt they had made a mistake. To rectify the problem, Dimchev, the Voden Ohrana commander, requested permission for his unit to join the Partisans. But before anything could be done, Dzhodzho, the Partisan Cheta commander, called for a meeting. In August 1944 a meeting was organized in the village Teovo, Voden Region, where Dimchev and Dzhodzho met and had discussions. While Dimchev insisted that his unit leave the city of Voden fully armed with light arms and remain intact under his leadership, Dzhodzho spelled out his demands as follows:

All Macedonians who had joined the Ohrana and felt they had made a mistake in joining were to quit the Ohrana and join the Partisan army fully armed. If they were willing to voluntarily fight against the occupier they would be pardoned. It was also clearly stressed that those who had committed crimes would be severely punished. Upon accepting these conditions, the Ohrana unit would be disarmed and the arms and ammunition would be given to the Macedonian battalion; this would weaken the enemy's strength and create the right conditions to free the city.

Having heard Dzhodzho's demands, Dimchev would agree only if his entire unit remained intact and separate but was willing to share joint command. This condition however was unacceptable to Dzhodzho. Dzhodzho argued that that would not only compromise his position with his Greek partners, but would place his own Partisans in a precarious position. The Partisan battalion had enough arms consisting of old and defective rifles to only arm a single Cheta while the Ohrana unit had new and modern arms. If there was any sort of disagreement the Macedonian battalion would have found itself in a critical situation.

This meeting unfortunately was monitored by the German Gestapo which took strong measures to stop further contact between the two groups and to liquidate this branch of the Ohrana. But in spite of all enemy efforts, many Macedonians fled the Ohrana and joined the Macedonian Partisans. Those who were guilty of having committed crimes were certainly punished but the rest who were simply victims of enemy propaganda fought against the occupied with honour and some even lost their lives.

On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 in the village Pozdivishcha, Kostur Region, the Lerin-Kostur Macedonian Battalion was formed. This was due to the persistent demands from the Macedonian people in Lerin and Kostur Regions to have their own army and their need to have more involvement in NLAG matters.

There were many preliminary and significant conditions imposed on the Battalion's formation by the Greek side, mainly due to the Lebanon Agreement which needed to be ironed out.

In view of the announcement made that another all Macedonian battalion was going to be formed, some communist Greeks were nervous. Objections, especially in Kostur Region, became even more electrified by the attitude of Andonis Andonopoulos – Periklis, secretary of the regional committee of the CPG, during a party meeting in the village Dmbeni when he said: "The Macedonians as a minority will live in socialism, in northern Greece". In other words Greece was not ready or not willing to discuss the Macedonian question and he was more that happy to promote the status quo but under a Socialist system. This was unacceptable to the Macedonians as voiced by one Macedonian present at that meeting who challenged the secretary: "We Macedonians want our national freedom now and we can get it..." In other words we want our full rights now and are fully capable of fighting for them.

Comments such as the above however only created mistrust between the CPG and the Macedonians. This mistrust manifested itself in significantly lowering the induction of Macedonian volunteers into the ranks of NLAG and other Greek political and military organizations. It also prompted many Macedonians already serving to desert. As mentioned earlier, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse at that time was in Gramos, suspended from duty and very much disappointed in what was happening.

In Greece, particularly in Greek occupied Macedonia, a mass movement was forming in protest against the Lebanon Agreement. Under pressure from the people, the central committee and leadership of the CPG took measures to defuse the situation by canceling the agreement and re-orienting itself towards the Macedonian Liberation Army in Yugoslavia.

Opting out of the Lebanon agreement was an indication, at least on the surface, that the Greek Communist leadership was ready to accept revolutionary ideals and tactics. In this endeavour the CPG leadership turned its attention to forming what appeared to be a meaningful and trusting relationship with the Macedonians. This however, was not done to give Macedonians more rights but to engage them in the Greek communist struggle and to fulfill Greek communist ambitions.

As a result of this new relationship, among other things, the Kostur Region Battalion at Karaorman was ordered to return to Kostur Region and continue its activities in its mobilization of new recruits from the ranks of the Macedonian people and to form new Macedonian detachments, battalions and brigades which were to be commanded by Macedonians under the leadership of NLAG.

As was decided and agreed upon, the all Macedonian Kostur Region Battalion, as mentioned earlier, arrived on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 at the village Pozdivishcha where its formation was finally formalized.

The task of forming the Macedonian battalion and commanding the NLAG division in the region was entrusted to Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, who at that time was in Gramos fighting the largest Germans offensive of 1944.

On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 Ilija Dimovski – Gotse along with 30 more Macedonian fighters arrived in Pozdivishcha and took command of the battalion as ordered.

August 2<sup>nd</sup>, the day of the Ilinden Uprising, a significant day for the Macedonian people was chosen to announce the creation of a Macedonian battalion, an all Macedonian battalion with all Macedonian national characteristics.

On the occasion of the anniversary of the Ilinden Uprising, a meeting was also held on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, in the village Pozdivishcha, where, according to the agenda, discussions between the Greek National Liberation Front's (GNLF) representative Renos Mihaleas and the representative of Republic of Macedonia Petre Bogdanov – Kochko took place. Among the many who attended and spoke was Naum Pejov, who had returned from the Republic of Macedonia and was pressured to publicly admit that he was in error when he gave his support for the Macedonian separation from NLAG.

According to a Greek Party document here is what was said: “Renos sought to convince Kochko and Pejov, especially Pejov, to admit to having made an error but Pejov refused to and spoke against the CPG reaffirming his position for the need for self-government and the reunification of the Macedonian people.” Under this kind of pressure or for some other reasons Renos replied: “You are entitled to Macedonia up to Solun. We will take the Dodecanese and Cyprus. Form your own brigade, division and your Macedonian army. Appoint Ilija Dimovski – Gotse commander of the division...”

In another similar party document it says that during the gathering Lambro Pejov also spoke and was very critical of the GNLF-NLAG politics and asked that Lazo Damovski – Oshenski be released from prison who, as mentioned earlier, at the time was locked-up by NLAG being accused for participating in the above mentioned Macedonian separation.

According to statements made by Renos Mihaleas, it was possible to form a Macedonian brigade depending on the available number of fighters. Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, organized four Cheti (bands) from available fighters from the unit that returned from Karaorman, the fighters he acquired from Gramos, other fighters who joined the Karaorman unit after its return and from the inflow of new recruits which would have constituted the new battalions. Unfortunately the NLAG leadership would not allow it. The unit which was proposed to be formed, owing to the number of fighters, constituted the Lerin-Kostur Region Macedonian battalion named “Gotse” after its commander Ilija Dimovski – Gotse.

Prior to the objections it was recommended that Ilija Dimovski – Gotse take command of the battalion and Hristo Kolentsev be made commissar. Afterwards everything changed. On September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1944 under orders from NLAG regiment 28, Kozmas Spatos – Amintas, a Greek of Albanian descent, was appointed kommander of the battalion. Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was reduced to captain and Hristo Kolentsev was reduced to party secretary of the battalion.

Afraid that the Macedonians would develop their own military capabilities, and perhaps slip out of its control, the CPG leadership made every effort to prevent the renewed Macedonian movement from expanding but for the time the Greek communist tricks did not work.

Stringos, secretary of the CPG Macedonian bureau, questioned Renos's rationale for allowing the formation of a battalion when orders were given to only form one Cheta (unit) in Kostur Region and Karadzova. Renos replied with a question: "And what will have been the damages if divisions were to be formed?" To which Stringos replied: "You are naïve. If the Macedonians had divisions, then they would not be found in Macedonia..." (Quote taken from a letter from Renos to Dobrovoje Radosavlejevich Ortse. The original text can be found in the Yugoslav military historical archives).

Orders, commands, reports and other communications in the battalion were carried out in the Macedonian language. A few days after the Battalion's formation, Renos Mihaleos contacted Ilija Dimovski – Gotse and informed him that a GNLF non communist officer from the NLAG regiment 28 was going to be paying him a visit to do an inspection. Renos told Ilija that all communications in the battalion must be done in the Greek language.

Perturbed by such a request, Ilija replied: "We are not all communists either. We are patriotic Macedonians and like you and the GNLF who are fighting for your national rights, we too are fighting for ours and for our freedom."

Immediately after the "Gotse" and the "Voden" battalions were formed a massive number of Macedonians began to join the ranks of the Partisans. With these kinds of numbers, it was possible to not only form brigades but divisions. When the Gotse battalion was formed it had 400 fighters. About a month later (September 16) it was numbering 650 and by October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the number jumped to 1,500. This was unprecedented for the resistance movement in Greek occupied Macedonia especially since the CPG had entered into the unfavorable Lebanon agreement with the enemy the "right".

For the sake of "national unity" a "right wing" government was appointed to lead Greece under the leadership of Georgios Papandreou. Papandreou's "right wing" Greek government unfortunately did not recognize the existence of the Macedonian people in Greece. If a

government did not even recognize the existence of Macedonians then how was it going to tolerate armed Macedonian units, Macedonian soldiers and Macedonian institutions? The CPG leadership, in order to placate the government, again began to suppress the Macedonian people by taking rigorous action to take away their rights and stop the expansion of their forces.

One of the measures undertaken was to stop Macedonians from joining the ranks of the Partisans. In a communiqué to the Central committee of the Macedonian Bureau on September 12, 1944, the CPG, among other things said: "Let it be noted that our side recons it's time to stop recruiting fighters from the ranks of the Slavo-Macedonians".

Even a reactionary historian was prompted to write: "The joining of the Slavophones in the army was massive and 300 of them traveled to Langa, the camp of the 28<sup>th</sup> brigade of ELAS [NLAG], to be armed. But the commander of the brigade Lazaridis Hr. by his own initiative armed only 50, who sent them to the units of the 28<sup>th</sup> foot brigade, and to the others he gave temporary dismissal..." ("Misteriata na Gotse", odlumka 169 vo v. "Elinikos Vordas" od VII.1955).

Immediately after the battalion was formed it was sent on a mission to disarm the villages that were armed by the enemy.

In only a span of fifteen days the villages Prekopana, Chereshnitsa and others were disarmed collecting around 200 rifles, a few heavy machine guns and ammunition.

The attack on the city of Lerin too was successful. The Partisans torched a fuel depot, destroyed an ammunition depot and broke up an enemy tax collection ring. Bitter battles broke out through the streets in arm to arm combat killing eighty German soldiers.

Since its formation on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 the Macedonian battalion had destroyed ten German trucks, had taken fifteen German prisoners and freed one-hundred and ten Armenian captives. In its few missions in August 1944 the Macedonian battalion had taken out of action 220 Germans in total. The battalion relentlessly pursued the occupier near the Bigla Mount territory destroying his communications and damaging his transportation lines. Sixty German soldiers were killed in a single battle in Kamenik village on the Lerin-Bitola road. But with all its successes the Greek communists were never satisfied and found something to criticize the Macedonians about. This no doubt brought back old suspicions questioning whether the Greek communist "good intentions" towards the Macedonians were genuine or another ruse to use them to do their dirty work?

## **The Macedonian Battalions**

From the first day the Macedonian Kajmakchalan and Vicho battalions were formed there were questions about them from the Greek side no matter how well they performed and how loyal they were to the cause. Over time this created doubts in the Macedonian leadership about the NLAG leadership's "intentions" towards the Macedonians.

The massive enrolment of Macedonian youths in these Macedonian units should have given the Greek leadership reason to celebrate but instead most Greeks became steadily uneasy and before long their reactions came to expression.

Anyone wanting to join the Macedonian battalions had to pass by the medical clinic to be given a medical exam. The medical clinic for the Kajmakchalan battalion was located in the village Manastir about eight hours walk away from the headquarters. As a large number of Macedonian young men began to arrive the medical staff rejected almost all of them, telling them that they were "unfit" to become Partisans and that they should go home. Some took the doctor's advice and went home yet others, especially those who insisted they wanted to join the Kajmakchalan battalion, were lead to a far away place and forced to join alternate units in the 14<sup>th</sup> brigade.

Similar incidents were also taking place in the Lerin and Kostur Regions. When 200 Macedonian youths arrived in Dmbeni to join the Partisans, the medical staff categorically prohibited them from joining the Macedonian battalion and forced them to join Greek units.

But that was not all. As the Macedonian units were growing in size and number they were expected to be trained and armed. Unfortunately in all cases the Greek leadership would only allow one unit to be armed leaving the others to fend for themselves. This was done not because there was a shortage of weapons, but because these were the tactics of the so called Greek progressive leadership of the time. Ironically as the number of recruits increased so did the number of weapons. But instead of giving weapons to the Macedonian fighters, the Greeks stored them in warehouses. Such was the case in Pozdivishcha where a large number of rifles, machine guns, grenade throwers and ammunition were stored instead of being issued to Macedonians. This was unacceptable to the Macedonian leadership especially at a time when all forces in the world were mobilizing to fight against the occupier. Then another blow was delivered to the Macedonians when the leadership of the 28<sup>th</sup> brigade sent a letter to the Macedonian leadership in Kostur requesting that all officers and soldiers in the Macedonian battalion who were in possession of pistols, immediately surrender them because they were needed to be issued to the diversionists in Solun. This included all personal weapons which most of the fighters acquired on their own. The next order came from the

divisional headquarters requesting that all automatic rifles possessed by the Macedonian battalion be returned.

By now it became obvious even to the soldiers of the lowest ranks that the Greek aim here was to completely disarm the battalion. No sooner had the orders been issued than another order arrived requesting that all remaining armed men be relocated to the village Flaviro (Negovan).

The reason for this behaviour, on the part of the CPG and NLAG leadership, becomes apparent when we examine the contents of a confidential letter sent to Zaharias, the commissar of the 28<sup>th</sup> brigade of NLAG, in which among other things the General Headquarters ordered Zaharias to move Ilija Dimovski – Gotse's battalion south where it could be isolated and fully disarmed, at any cost if necessary, because it posed a "danger". Before the contents of this letter became known, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse received another letter, this one from the divisional headquarters, ordering him to relocate his battalion south to Sjatista. No explanation was given.

By now the Macedonian leadership was well aware of the Greek tactics and had no doubt what the Greeks were planning. Now that all the Fascist counter-bands and threats from the Ohrana were put down the CPG and NLAG leadership felt that the Macedonians were no longer needed. Besides, the CPG and the NLAG Greek leaderships were still committed to the idea of "National Unity" in Greece and of course they did not want to disappoint the Papandreou government which only recently announced to the world by radio that "For Greece there is no Macedonian question".

Under these circumstances there was only one thing for the Macedonians to do and that is to implement measures to save themselves. Without breaking away from the fight with the Germans, the sought after Lerin-Kostur Region battalion disobeyed orders and imbedded itself in the strategic heights of Bigla Mountain where it waited to be pursued by NLAG. Sure enough so as not to be disappointed, a few days later the NLAG 28<sup>th</sup> brigade under the command of Yanoulis was dispatched in pursuit. The 28<sup>th</sup> brigade was no match for the Macedonians and they could have decimated it but cooler heads prevailed and the Macedonians decided to use diplomacy instead of violence. It was obvious that NLAG was not going to give up and would have sent more troops to fight which would have escalated the conflict between Macedonians and Greeks. Since this conflict would have occurred in Macedonian territories it would have also involved the Macedonian civilian population as casualties, which no Macedonian was willing to see happen.

So before a large concentration of NLAG forces had a chance to amass and to avoid bloodshed, on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the Macedonian battalion crossed over the Greek-Yugoslav border in Prespa and entered the Republic of Macedonia where it was put to good use fighting against the Germans who had entered Bitola-Prilep from Lerin.

The Voden Region Macedonian battalion also facing similar prospects of being disarmed and destroyed, on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1944 left Kozhuf Mountain and also crossed over the Greek-Yugoslav border in Kavadarci Region and entered the Republic of Macedonia.

On November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the two Macedonian battalions from Greek occupied Macedonia came together in the liberated territory of Bitola and joined forces to create the first Macedonian Shock Brigade. Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was appointed commander and Mohailo Keramidchiev became its commissar. A few days later the brigade was dispatched to Mount Shar to put down the Balisti, an Albanian group of German allies.

A couple of things were done wrong which forced the Macedonians to abandon their struggle in Greek occupied Macedonia. The first was the flawed tactics of the CPG and NLAG owing to opportunism and blind and chauvinistic attitudes towards the Macedonian question. The communist Greeks it seems were no different than the common fascist Greeks when it came to the Macedonians. The only difference was that the fascists had an open attitude in their hatred for the Macedonians while most communists kept theirs hidden. The second thing done wrong is the way the Macedonians showed their displeasure about how they were treated and left in protest. Not being there and not knowing the situation under which they picked this option leaves me wondering why they didn't put their faith in their own abilities and fight harder to negotiate a better deal for the Macedonian people. By leaving Macedonia not only did they abandon their own families and put them at risk, but proved to the Greeks that they had some sort of special relationship with the Macedonians in the Republic which made the Greeks even more suspicious. This was made plain and clear by the CPG Regional Committee when it was asked to investigate what had happened and when a directive was given to the regional committees in Lerin, Kostur and Voden Regions to call the act “anti-revolutionary” and brand the fighters “traitors”. The communist Greeks took the situation even further by openly calling the Macedonian leaders “sell-outs”, “autonomists” and whatever derogatory and damaging term they could think of that existed in the Greek dictionary and publicized it in their newspapers and pamphlets.

On November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the CPG Regional Committee for Kostur Region in its citation regarding the Macedonian situation among other things said: “Many Slavo-Macedonians from the ‘Gotse’ battalion consciously or unconsciously continued with the separation tactic, which is condemned by our party. They separated the struggle of the Slavo-Macedonians from the Struggle of the Greeks and as such became the organs and supporter of domestic and foreign Fascism. With that they did damage to the Greeks and sunk the Slavo-Macedonians. They continued the old acts of the Komitadzis in the Region.” “One more time we charge these people as traitors in the unified struggle.” “We invite all members of

the party, everyone from EAM (GNLF), all decent Greek patriots and Slavo-Macedonians to turn against them, against their lies and propaganda against their traitorous plans, against the ugly ‘adventurous clique’ which leads them...”

The Greeks, true to their cruelty, unfortunately did not stop with demonizing just the fighters who had fled; they also took revenge on their families. Parents, brothers, sisters, wives and even more distant relatives were jailed and abused. The families and wives of the Macedonian battalion leadership were surrendered to the National Militia and sent to the dreaded Greek concentration camps together with the occupier collaborators. One can only imagine the abuse, torture and cruelty exercised on these civilians, especially the women, who themselves had committed no crimes.

These outrageous Greek claims filed against the Macedonians however did not go unchallenged. The leadership of the Macedonian battalions, which clearly left Greek occupied Macedonia to avoid bloodshed, sent a protest letter in reply to the CPG, GNLF and NLAG slanderous campaign aimed against it. The protest letter addressed to the CPG Regional Committee for Macedonia spelled out their reasons for leaving. “... We did not leave so that we can be transformed into servants of Fascism – like your fiendish propaganda claims. We left because we are fighters, Macedonian fighters, because we wanted to fight against fascism, because we asked, based on the principles of a unified struggle, for the recognition of our peoples’ national rights and to be free to pursue the realization of our national destiny. Unfortunately everywhere and at each turn we ran into obstacles, denials, hate, disrespect and undemocratic treatment with regards to all issues concerning the Macedonian people.”

Following are some examples of how Macedonians were treated by their Greek communist partners in Greek occupied Macedonia:

In 1941 when Macedonians came out to join the first Partisan movement, the CPG not only did not help them organize but completely ignored them and left them on their own without leadership to be cut down by the Italian and German occupiers. This was the case all through 1941 and 1942 particularly in the Kostur Region under the leaderships of Athanasios Ziogas, secretary of the Regional Committee of Kostur Region, Periclis, Lefteris and others.

In 1943 when the first Greek Fascist counter-bands were forming fanatical nationalistic anti-Macedonian movements under the leadership of the likes of Kolaras, Baskakis, Captain Stefos, Kirchilakis and others, the Macedonian people yet again were ignored by the CPG and left to fend for themselves. Frightened by the terrorist acts of these traitors and executioners the Macedonian people ran to anyone who would offer them help. No wonder the Bulgarian Fascist propaganda found fertile soil in these people. Having said that, however, the vast majority of the

Macedonian people still found it in their hearts to take their place in the anti-fascist camps, struggling side by side with the so called “progressive Greeks”.

The CPG promised the Macedonian people that it would take the road to unity but instead it took the road to violence and the destruction of the Macedonian people who were poisoned by enemy propaganda. In March 1943 Periclis and Lefteris, both progressive Greeks, burned down the Macedonian village Starichani and executed 35 people because 2 of them were guilty. In April 1943 the Fascist Captain Kolaras executed 8 Macedonians from the village Gonenits while they were on their way to join NLAG and the NLAG and CPG leaderships did nothing.

In March of 1943 the same Pericles, under the influence of his right hand man Yannis Dailakis a known German collaborator, sentenced to death and executed five innocent Macedonian people from the village Ludovo. During the same month in the village Breshtani the homes of Macedonians falsely accused of belonging to Fascist counter-bands were plundered and burned down. During the same period Papaflesas’s unit jailed everyone in the village Galista, men and women, and beat them to death; his gangsters stripped the women naked and had their way with them, they even tortured under age minors. The same group of gangsters blockaded the Macedonian villages Zhuzheltsi, Moleni, Ezerets and Nestime and tortured the innocent villagers for absolutely no reason at all.

In May 1943, five Macedonians from the village Kalevishta were detained and later executed because two of them had been influenced by Bulgarian propaganda.

Daras, Renos and Kiriakos, all being “responsible” leaders, willfully on their own accord jailed and killed ten Macedonians from the villages Tresino, Sobotsko, Prevadishta and Chegan in Voden and Meglen Regions without giving any reason or explanation for why they did that.

Again during this period NLAG officers and fighters were unleashed in Greek occupied Macedonia to conduct anti-Macedonian raids. These chauvinists crisscrossed through Macedonian villages, swearing at, slandering and putting down Macedonians in a derogatory manner remnant of the Metaxas years. These people were Metaxas’s protégés and for them the Macedonians were “Paleovulgari” the lowest form of creatures known to Greeks. At another time an unknown group of Greeks entered the village Dobrolishta and killed an old Macedonian man whose son had just joined the ranks of NLAG.

Greeks came to Greek occupied Macedonia and terrorized people by calling them “Bulgars” and sarcastically made the point that this was Greece now and that forever they (Macedonians) would be “under Greece”. These thugs pushed their weight around plundering homes, breaking windows and intimidating people simply for the fun of it. These same thugs were later employed by the Greek state to round up

Macedonians and jail them in its concentration camps. They became Greece's best protectors and thrived in both the left and right side of the Greek equation all through the war years. Most joined the army and police force and some even rose to the ranks of commanding officers and police chiefs. Even at the lower military and police ranks, these people had higher authority and carried more clout than their superiors at the highest rank. Everyone feared them.

With people like that running Greece what chance did the Macedonians have? In retrospect one might argue that the Macedonian question was impossible to bring forth by political means and the Macedonians had absolutely no chance of gaining any rights. For the moment however the left continued to appease the Macedonians by giving them some slack so that they could use them to their advantage. When issues came to a head about the "Macedonian question" all these so called progressive Greeks could offer was to say that "the Macedonians are only a minority in Greece and they will achieve equal rights as one of the peoples in democratic Greece". There were no longer offers of "self determination". The Atlantic Decree and self determination may have existed for the Dodekanis and Cyprus but they no longer existed for the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia even at the moment when work began to create a Macedonian State in Yugoslavia.

Even though they fulfilled the Atlantic charter requirements for self determination by willfully and voluntarily fighting against the occupiers and disarming the Fascist groups inside Greece, the Macedonian Partisans in Greek occupied Macedonia received no recognition and no rewards. No one can dispute the fact that it was the Macedonians who disarmed and disbanded the Fascist counter-bands just as no one can dispute that proportionally more Macedonian fighters joined the struggle and fought harder than the Greeks to drive the occupier out. Yet still the Macedonians received no recognition and no reward; not even a mention for their effort.

Macedonian fighters from the NLAG reservist units in Kostur Region were responsible for disarming 45 villages and confiscating about 3,000 rifles without a mention. But worse than that, after the reservists did their job NLAG disarmed them and broke up their units.

The MNLF(G) (Macedonian National Liberation Front (in Greece)) was formed not only because of the necessity to protect its people but also because it had popular support from the Macedonian people. However as soon as this organization was formed the Greek side, especially its so called "Greek allies" had nothing good to say about it. In fact the opposite was true. The Greeks, including the CPG, NLAG and GNLF leaderships, were very hostile towards it, slandering it at every opportunity. Then when slander no longer worked and the organization kept growing the Greek leadership tried to block the Macedonian people from joining it. Trijantafilis, one of the Greek leaders, openly and publicly ridiculed the

Macedonians by saying that “only the stupid ones join the MNLF(G)...”. Not much later the same Greek leaders dismantled the MNLF(G) and jailed its leaders.

The formation of the MNLF(G) was controversial from the start yet at some of the conferences it was cheered with pompous slogans like “Forward with the formation of an MNLF(G) all Macedonian army” and wishing that the newly formed “Trpovski” detachment “grow to become a brigade...”. In retrospect all this turned out to be a trick concocted to give the impression that it was none other than the CPG that was responsible for the formation of the MNLF(G). In retrospect the CPG leadership yet again lied to the Macedonians to get into their hearts and minds and use and abuse them when it needed them and then cast them away when it didn’t.

The last part of the protest letter addressed to the CPG Regional Committee for Macedonia explaining why the battalions left said:

“As a people it is not our way to surrender even when we are found in such circumstances. We are the descendants of a revolutionary line of people just like your own Greek people.” (The original document can be found at Ilija Dimovski - Gotse’s archives. Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was Commander of the first Macedonian shock brigade in charge of the Macedonian Partisans from Greek occupied Macedonia.)

In addition to sending a protest letter to the CPG, the Lerin and Kostur Region battalion leadership also sent a communiqué to the Macedonian population to tell its side of the story and why it left. The communiqué was dated October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944 and said:

“We can no longer remain silent on this issue and need to answer to allegations made against us. We have fought against the Hitlero-Fascists along side the Greeks and have fulfilled our part of the obligation. We now must speak for our oppressed people and expose the lies and accusations the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment has charged against us. Every Partisan among us is fighting for his rights and knows that our struggle is for our freedom. Everyone knows that our struggle is the same struggle as the one the Partisans of NLAG are fighting and never, until now, have we moved away from the GNLF and NLAG line. Even today, under these circumstances, we are still ready to die fighting together with the decent Greek people.

“We categorically proclaim before the entire world that:

- 1) We are not brigands as we have been accused by the 28<sup>th</sup> foot regiment in its October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944 declaration. There are 1,500 decent Macedonian Partisans among us who fight for justice and for our rights. They are the representatives of the entire population of Kostur and Lerin Regions. If all these Partisans, your children, the children of Macedonia are bandits, like the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment

claims, then our entire Macedonian population must be brigands and bandits.

- 2) It's a great big lie and an invention to say that we took our responsibilities lightly and left without consideration and that we took measures against NLAG. You need to know the truth and the truth is that NLAG took measures against us by disarming our units. You need to also know that NLAG military units were sent to round us up and disarm us. They were planning to take us south to old Greece for the sole purpose of destroying the Macedonian Partisan movement. We could not allow that to happen especially at these critical times when our people need us to protect them. We could also not allow a conflict to take place in our home or to fight against our brothers. That is why we had to leave.

It is important for everyone to know that to this day the GNLF and NLAG have not informed our people that there exists the Atlantic Charter in which, according to its five principles, all people who fought to liberate their lands from the Fascist occupier have the right to fight for their national freedom and create their own state. We took up arms to do exactly that, to achieve that right to free ourselves. We the Macedonians are prepared to die to the last man to achieve that and we will not allow anyone to divide us as they now are attempting to do.

How can we trust NLAG and believe what they tell us when Papandreou's Cabinet Minister only recently went on the radio and declared publicly to everyone that 'for Greece the Macedonian question does not exist'. We can no longer tolerate the lies and still be patient. We want our rights and we too want to live free just as the Greeks want to live free. We don't want new dictators and we have no desire to have foreign masters. And exactly for those reasons we will all fight, just like our partners are fighting to smash Hitler and his cohorts and to bring freedom to the entire oppressed world." (The above information was taken from Ilija Dimovski - Gotse's personal archives).

A separate open letter was also sent to the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia by the Lerin Region Macedonian Movement leadership to inform them of the real reasons for the battalion's exodus and to answer to the slanderous campaign waged against them by the CPG, GNLF and NLAG. The letter written by Turundzhov and Popdimitrov dated October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1944 among other things said:

"Even though a joint decision was made to form a NLAG brigade commanded by Macedonian officers, the NLAG leadership took every measure possible to obstruct it so that our needs would not be met. As everyone is aware our LMNF(G) detachments were dismantled in favour of Macedonians joining NLAG units, but later another decision was made to break up those too, including the Gotse battalion. Forced by these actions, on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1944 we called a conference in Kostur Region and

invited all delegates from Western Macedonia including those from NLAG division IX. During that conference a decision was made to continue the build up of forces to battalions and even divisions if necessary. This was a prerequisite if we were to overpower the occupier and his collaborators. Unfortunately when we made these announcements to those responsible for the buildup of the NLAG reservist forces, they sent people after us to round us up and jail us. So to avoid bloodshed we decided to cross over the border into our free Macedonia to continue our fight against the occupier there.”

To be fair, not all Greeks in the CPG, GNLf and NLAG were deliberately hostile towards the Macedonians. There were a small number who felt sympathetic and were willing to follow international norms but they too quickly became silent after falling victim to the same chauvinistic attitudes that the Macedonians were experiencing.

One Greek officer who showed such sympathy was Renos, commissar of the IX division of NLAG. In a report dated November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1944 addressed to the headquarters of a group of divisions in Greek occupied Macedonia, Renos, among other things said:

“Reading Bakirdzhis’s interview in the publication “Lajki Foni” I noticed there was a reference made about the Macedonians being called “Bulgarophone Greeks” which I find unacceptable and counterproductive and will not help our relationship with the Partisan movement in Macedonia.”

“As a Partisan from NLAG, I find am obliged to protest at such actions because they cloud people’s judgments and hide the truth, as is the case with the Gotse battalion. This cannot be good for our unified struggle. Also it seems to me that each time we talk about enemy activities we always emphasize those of the Bulgarian side but rarely do we mention those of the Greek side. We also quickly forget that it was those heroic Macedonian Partisans who free us by destroying the village Fascist counter-bands.”

“We commit injustice without precedence when we mistreat the very same people who sacrificed themselves for our freedom by calling them “Bulgarophone Greeks”. We commit injustice without precedence when we omit to tell the world the truth about how these people struggled to liquidate the counter-bands and to fight against repression.”

“If I were a Macedonian Partisan I would be demanding to be given an explanation about all this and as long as one is not given, I too would be disgruntled like a dissatisfied worker.”

“It was Churchill who said ‘Tito solved his national question’ by allowing the Macedonians in Yugoslavia to continue their Ilinden struggle and to create a Macedonian state inside the Yugoslav Federation. That is a reality which we must face and stop closing our eyes and leading a life of

blindness. This will damage our peace and brotherhood in the Balkans.” (The above quotes come from Hristo Andonovski’s personal archives).

Renos, being an exception to the usual Greek leaders, did not see the leaving of the battalion as simply another isolated incident of protest but rather as a progression of a disgruntled people who sacrificed themselves since 1912 by participating in Greek wars and in place of receiving recognition are being labeled “Bulgarians”, a very demeaning and derogatory title.

Renos did not agree with the CPG’s negative and slanderous campaign waged against the Macedonian battalion and used every opportunity to make his displeasure known as was the case in a newsletter where he was quoted saying: “How can we say that these people are autonomists and separatists and who will believe us especially after they spilled blood fighting for our cause and for unity with the Greeks. How can NLAG earn the respect of the people and expect to have any authority after such conduct?”

Unfortunately Renos was not only unable to sway the chauvinists in the CPG Regional Committee to change their attitude but as a result of publicly having such opinions he made enemies of his own. In time he began to lose his authority and soon afterwards he was relieved of all responsibility.

By the end of 1944 the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia did not only lose all rights afforded to them by the Atlantic Charter but while surrounded by their enemies the Fascist occupier and its collaborators on one side and the Greek left and right on the other, they lost their own protectors, the Macedonian battalions, and sacrificed themselves, it seems, for nothing.

Proportionally, based on the population’s participation, unquestionably the Macedonian contribution in the struggle was the highest. We can safely say that from Lerin, Kostur, Voden and Solun Regions alone more than 90,000 Macedonian people joined the ranks of the Liberation Movement. Six thousand Macedonians joined the NLAG shock units and another 7,000 participated in the NLAG reservists. The first shock brigade alone had 1,700 Macedonian volunteers.

Three thousand Macedonians were killed in battle, 4,094 Macedonian houses were burned, 4,150 men and women were sent to concentration prison camps and properties in 38 villages and towns were destroyed.

Specifically, we have information that 380 people were killed in the village Katrnitsa, 200 in the villages Rantsi, Nestram and Vlahoklisura and 100 in the villages Gramatikovo and Enidzhe-Vardar.

In addition to those killed in combat, thousands more of the best and brightest Macedonians lost their lives in the Greek prisons like Luguntsi, and Ljuminitsa in Meglen Region, in the prison camps like “Pavlos Melas”

in Solun, Karditsa and Volos and in the dry islands like Ajstratis. (Hristo Andonovski, “Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija”, pages 145 and 146)

## The Unleashing of White Terror

When the Germans left Greece in October 1944, there was very little to prevent the Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF) and the National Liberation Army of Greece (NLAG) from seizing power. By then the Leftists dominated all the villages and towns, had driven the Rightist parties out of Greece and had rounded up most collaborators.

The British forces that landed in Athens were untrained and no match for the superior NLAG force. Yet the GNLF and NLAG leadership made no effort to seize power in Greece. Instead they welcomed the appointment of Prime Minister George Papandreou a non-Leftist and for what? For the few ministries he offered them?

The Soviet Union had made it clear to the Leftist Greeks that they could not depend on Soviet support in an armed seizure of power but still the Leftist leaders, who at the time had the upper hand, did nothing to negotiate something better. Did they know that Greece was given back to British influence as decided by Stalin and Churchill? Anyway, it didn't matter if they knew or not because the Leftists failed to take advantage of their strong position while they could. Unfortunately failing that, many in the GNLF/NLAG leadership became suspicious of their top leaders especially when the British started returning the Rightists to power at their expense.

It did not take too long for things to boil over as mistrust and suspicion between the Leftists and those ushered into power by British support reached almost unbearable levels. Nevertheless many members of the GNLF/NLAG could not understand why the leadership hesitated to take power.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944, just barely two months after the Germans left Greece, the Leftist ministers in the Papandreou government quit after being unable to agree on the composition of the new police force and who should control the armed forces. The next day, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1944, a large demonstration organized by the GNLF broke out in Athens and began to march towards Constitutional Square. The police opened fire and killed a number of demonstrators, marking the beginning of the Greek Civil War.

Fighting at the time was isolated to Athens and continued until January 1945 when both sides agreed to talk. Meetings were held at Varkiza, a seaside resort near Athens, and a treaty was signed on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1945. Signed by the Right, Left and the British, among other things, the Varkiza Treaty called for (a) the GNLF to disband NLAG, (b) legalize the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) and (c) hold a referendum on the return of the monarchy. NLAG troops were to be given political amnesty for the return of their weapons, people were to be guaranteed free speech, martial

law was to be lifted and people were to be given amnesty for all political crimes.

When news of the Varkiza agreement reached Greek occupied Macedonia people were shocked and felt as if they were just sold out to their enemies. There was nothing in the agreement about rights for the Macedonians.

This was pure and simple capitulation to a weak enemy which defies logic yet Nikos Zahariadis the CPG's general secretary called it a victory for the resistance and for the GNLf and CPG. Those assurances were echoed yet again by Zahariadis a year later at the Varkiza first anniversary when he said the agreement was the most reasonable decision.

During the second general assembly of the CPG's Central Committee, which took place on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1946, Zahariadis in his own leadership speech stated:

"...this day marks the first anniversary since the signing of the Varkiza Agreement in which included are our aims and objectives that will take Greece on its way to a peaceful democratic evolution, which will unite the people and let them exercise their free expression in the free elections so that our state can take the road to tranquility and reconstruction. That was our inclination and our aim then. That inclination was correct. Without any doubt today we will have to say it one more time, because it absolutely answers to the democratic and national interests. The signing of the Varkiza Agreement was the right step which could have been taken under those circumstances." (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Mislja, 1971, page 149)

A year later the CPG top leadership was still blind to what was really going on and continued to operate under the kind of illusion that everything was going great. Even after power was snatched from its hands it failed to comprehend that it had voluntarily capitulated to the Right.

If we consider the fact that Greece came under British influence and Britain, particularly Churchill who hated communism with a passion, did not want a communist Greece then we have to wonder what were the top Leftist leaders really thinking about? They were well aware that they were not going to receive help from the USSR and the British did not want a communist Greece so they were left with two choices, surrender or fight. It seems they chose to surrender in a way that was not so obvious to everyone. This surrender came in the form of the Varkiza Agreement. Unfortunately, from the point of view of the British, even after surrendering NLAG, Greece would remain communist and would gain that privilege through the democratic process of voting communist. Something more had to be done.

We can continue to believe that the Leftists in Greece, who by the way were very popular with the people at a grass roots level and would have

won a majority at the polls, were really stupid or we can look for a more probable reason for what was really going on.

There are historians and authors out there who offer their perspective on things but most are apologists for the Greek side and none has shown any interest in investigating or reporting the Macedonian side as the Macedonians saw it. They can call it as they like but the reader must remember a of couple things. One, the minority Rightists most of whom collaborated with the German and Italian occupiers won the war with Britain's help and as the saying goes, the winners write history. Two, the reader is entitled to know both sides of the story and the Macedonian side is yet to be written.

While the British and later the Americans tried to stem the tide of communism in Greece by any means possible, the Greek government sought its opportunity to silence the Macedonian people once and for all.

The Varkiza Agreement initiated what became known on the political left as the White Terror. Rather than prosecuting collaborators, the Greek Justice Minister and the police, together with right wing anticommunist bands, ignored the political amnesty offered by the Varkiza Agreement and continued the collaborationist struggle against the resistance fighters and supporters suspected of having leftist connections. Wartime heroes were executed for killing collaborators and judges and tax collectors of the Political Committee for National Liberation went to jail for unauthorized representation of the Greek government, etc. Right-wing death squads and paramilitary groups embarked on a campaign of terror and assassination against Leftists and suspected Leftists.

Janis Petsopulos, a member of the central committee of the CPG, described the Varkiza agreement as "a capitulation without conditions which earned the high leadership the right to free movement and ability to bear arms while it surrendered the defenseless resistance fighters to the hands of the ultra-nationalists".

The newly established Greek National Guard was dominated by right-wing officers, who with British assistance began to reconstruct the gendarmerie, which between June 1945 and September 1946 grew from 9,000 to 28,569 men and became increasingly militarized and unpopular with the Greek public.

In May 1945 Captain Pat Evans reported from Lerin on "a general lack of confidence ...a number of people have been remarking in cafés and other public places: 'There is no State'. 'The Communists did at any rate make things run, whatever else they may have done.' 'The present Government is useless'!" (Mazower, Mark, "After the War was Over Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943-1960", 2000, Princeton University Press. Pages 11 and 12)

From the summer of 1945 onward, the Greek government initiated anti-Leftist policies in an attempt to control the Leftists. This was done

with the aid of public security committees which the government filled with trusted appointees. Such policies were originally set up in 1924 which allowed the government to outlaw persons considered dangerous to public security. Together with special military tribunals, these committees contributed to the drastic increase of special courts set up to work outside the regular judicial system.

In September 1946 the Greek government enacted a law designed to punish the families of army deserters. Imprisonment for political crimes was on the increase and as regular prisons became dangerously overcrowded, new systems of detention were being invented including detention centers, islands of deportation, concentration camps, etc.

Incarcerating large number of democrats, male and female of all ages, dated back to before the Metaxas dictatorship, which involved the punishment of people not for their deeds but for their ideas, but the sheer number of those incarcerated during this period was far larger than at any time in the past, and easily dwarfed even the thousands jailed or detained under Metaxas. There was a far greater number of women and even children detained during this period than ever before, necessitating the need for special women's camps. In 1934, for example, there were approximately 130 women jailed in the Averoff Women's Prison in Athens. By 1945 the number of prisoners had grown tenfold. "The strains upon the primitive infrastructure required to support such an expansion of the system of incarceration can be judged in the remarkable collection of photos taken by women inmates and recently published under the heading *Gynaikes exoristes sta stratopeda tou emfyliou.*" (Mazower, Mark, "After the War was Over Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943-1960", 2000, Princeton University Press. Page 14)

The amount of violence used by the Greek government was also much greater than in the past. Even the death penalty was used against Leftists between 1945 and 1950 which overshadowed the violence perpetrated in all previous and subsequent periods. It is interesting to point out that while Greek governments in the immediate postwar period were disinclined to carry out death sentences against known and convicted collaborators and war criminals, such reservations were much less in evidence against the Leftists, especially after the 1946 elections.

"And what did the Varkiza agreement provides us with?" writes Janis Petsopoulos, "...in simple terms, it provided the top leadership with the right to safeguard its own immunity and amnesty while allowing Greece to take away our right of participation in the decisions made in Yalta (which by the way were designed to serve British politics in Greece). The Varkiza agreement allowed for the installation of the fascists in Greece and surrendered our fighters to the executioner and habitual criminal" (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Misla, 1971, page 151)

Aris Veluhiotis, commissar of the main headquarters of NLAG, along with about one hundred Partisans who had no faith in the Varkiza agreement, detached themselves from the battalion and took to the mountains. The central committee of CPG naturally responded by calling Veluhiotis a “deserter” who on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1945 was found dead on Mount Pind. Circumstances surrounding his death to this day have not been explained.

Historians that support the Right, leave it to be understood that Veluhiotis was killed by people from the CPG, claiming that only they know his whereabouts and movements.

In view of the disagreements between the various resistance leaders, the CPG purged Petsopoulos, Orestis and Zaharias from the ranks of the party and took measures against the leadership of the Macedonian battalion by initiating a campaign of slanderous propaganda rivaling that of Gables. Macedonian leaders opposing the Varkiza agreement were automatically labeled “autonomists” and “sell outs to the Intelligence Service”.

A flyer released in Voden on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1944 referring to Veluhiotis’s splinter group puts it this way: “Those are autonomists and anarchists and with their own brand of adventurism are solely responsible for bringing hardship to the Slavo-Macedonians. They claim to be your protectors but far from it, they are provocateurs who by their actions have provoked the fascist elements to new and more brutal acts against you Slavo-Macedonians.”

Anyone from the CPG or from the GNLF who spoke up in the defense of the splinter group was labeled a traitor. The CPG high leadership openly suggested to people who harboured such thoughts that they were better off going to jail then going to the mountains.

In reference to Veluhiotis fleeing to the mountains, Zahariadis said “it was an attempt to pass with yesterday’s expired ticket”. Attempting to explain what happened, Zahariadis blamed it on a misunderstanding by putting it this way: “A large number of our membership had difficulty comprehending what it is that we are trying to do and where we want to go with the Varkiza Agreement. The confusion comes from a number of members who have a small difference of opinion. Some, like Veluhiotis for example could be dangerous that is why the party had to take decisive action. Party members like him wanted to hold on to their guns and to continue the guerilla war.” (Quotes from Zahariadis’s speech from the CPG plenum of the central committee, July 1, 1945).

After Varkiza the CPG leadership took the attitude that in a short time it would be able to develop a massive political fight in the cities and take over the leadership of various organizations and count on their support in future parliamentary elections. In other words the CPG was heavily counting on the masses to support it. This was a good strategy and worked

with the working class syndicates, the farmers' cooperatives and the skill organizations. Unfortunately the government was well aware of the CPG's intentions and took counter measures. The government knew it could not win a majority vote through a political fight so with the help of the British and the Rightists it began to bolster its military capabilities. When the government was certain of its military strength it decapitated the workers' movements by imprisoning its Leftist leaders and by forcefully replacing them with government appointees. But it did not stop there. Exploiting the situation that the resistance fighters were now disarmed and would take some time before they could re-organize and re-arm, the government re-armed the former collaborators, the same collaborators who collaborated with the German and Italian occupiers, and enlisted them in the gendarme and into newly formed National Guard battalions. These former collaborators were given unprecedented power to act as they pleased which unleashed an unbelievable terror campaign against the population.

Between 1945 and early 1946 force was the rule of law in Greek occupied Macedonia where beatings and atrocities were committed daily against democratic citizens. Not only the jails but barns and stables everywhere were filled with people who supported the resistance movement. According to official statistics in 1945 there were 17,985 people jailed of whom 15,596 were jailed without a trial. Another 18,401 were accused of various crimes and 48,936 were accused of being members of GNLF and NLAG. About 80,000 people in total were pursued by the Greek government in 1945.

The terror, as a means to break the Leftists, took frightening measures with each passing day. This is how the situation was described on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1945: "After the December incident terror became the rule of law with the arming and unprecedented growth of the extreme Right. Every day life for the non-royal citizens became unbearable. This is a sad affair and the state cannot be without responsibility. The terrorist organizations of the far right most of which were armed by the Germans and cooperated with them, now cooperate with the government to extinguish the democratic spirit. It was the government that enlisted the skills and services of these terrorists and is allowing the atrocities to multiply daily. Therefore the government is responsible for the lockups, imprisonments, the raping of women, the hangings, the beatings and humiliations carried out against the free citizens. This represents a black spot on our civilization." (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Mislja, 1971, page 155)

Here is how the Regional Governor of Kozheni Region described the situation in a letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs: "From a standpoint of public order the district is finding itself in a savage situation. Disgusting things are happening; multiple hangings, known criminals are being freed from jails, etc. These acts are carried out by known collaborators of the Germans, under whose leadership they developed these blood thirsty

skills.” (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Misl, 1971, page 155)

Unfortunately the government, in order to camouflage its own atrocities against the democratic people in Greece, accused the communists and other peaceful groups of murdering nationalists, of hiding arms, and of “surrendering Macedonia to the Slavs”.

After Varkiza terror in Greek occupied Macedonia rose to unprecedented levels and without opposition. Well known collaborators like the cut throat Mihalaras (Mihalis Papadopoulos) and Kolaras were unleashed on the innocent and unarmed Macedonian population. Kolaras, a well known collaborator who was working for the Germans during the occupation, was seen many times being driven in the same vehicle with the British Captain Evans. Evans was a British Mission representative responsible for the Vicho Region during the occupation. Kolaras was well known for his beastly methods of liquidating his victims.

Kostas Papadopoulos, a Greek reservist second lieutenant, wearing a military uniform who during the occupation commanded an entire detachment of cut throat traitors was responsible for the death of over 500 patriots an activity he continued to pursue even after Varkiza. There is no doubt that the British not only knew about this but were party to it as the attacks on the Macedonian villages escalated and were turning into a tragedy.

The National Guard was the first Greek army formed by the government after Varkiza and consisted exclusively of soldiers who had Greek nationalist persuasiveness. In Greek occupied Macedonia the National Guard in 1945 consisted of the following:

Under the military command in Solun were battalions 115, 150, 163, 183 and 605. Under the military command in Ber were battalions 111, 103 and, 305. Under the military command in Seres were battalions 145 and 158. And under the military command in Drama were battalions 101, 147, 159 and 167.

After the National Guard was trained by the British Mission and transformed into a regular army it conducted a series of raids on Macedonian villages in the mountains. These raids, which included killings, beatings and abuse of peaceful citizens, were conducted together with British military units during the period from February to September 1945 and were designed to terrorize CPG, GNLF and NLAG sympathizers.

Like the National Guard, the first formations of the gendarme were also trained by the British Mission under General Charles Ujakam (sp?) a well known enemy of the communist ideology, well known from the time he was chief of the British military interventionist forces in the Soviet Union.

During the summer of 1945 the gendarme consisted of 27,000 men from which 14,000 were stationed in Greek occupied Macedonia. New “hunting units” were formed from the most ruthless of these men and together with the special units trained for “mountain operations” were sent to conduct a number of surprise and abrupt attacks against the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG).

With the increase in terror perpetrated by the ultra-nationalist Rightist bands, many former resistance fighters fled their homes and villages for self-protection and began to form new bands in the mountains. By late 1946 it was evident that the country was facing civil war. These bands, most of which were remnants of NLAG, once again began to organize another form of resistance. This time resisting the Greek government forces which were determined to liquidate them. These rag tag forces became the Democratic Army of Greece, the postwar successor to NLAG, except that communist control was much tighter and the ideological stakes were less ambiguous. Initially DAG was very successful in fighting against the newly reformed “Greek National Army”. But British and later American assistance, combined with a policy of forcibly relocating tens of thousands of villages to starve out the guerillas and increasing Greek military sophistication, turned the tide. As the guerrilla struggle became something much closer to a conventional military conflict, the advantages enjoyed by the government army eventually proved decisive.

In 1946 the democratic population in Greece once again rose up and took up arms to fight against oppression and with it stood the Macedonian population which had no other choice but to fight for its survival.

## Terror in Greek occupied Macedonia

During the German and Italian occupation the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia, in spite of being occupied, enjoyed some freedoms including the ability to speak Macedonian, their mother tongue, which had been denied to them by the Greeks since Greece occupied Macedonia in 1912. By their participation and sacrifices in the resistance movement resulting in the eviction of the occupiers the Macedonian people felt they had earned their freedom and place in Greek society and were entitled to equal rights. Unfortunately as events unfolded Macedonians not only lost everything they had gained but now were about to lose even more. From the first day the Greek National Guard arrived in Macedonia it began an unprecedented terror campaign.

The moment the National Guard entered the city of Voden it began firing live rounds at civilians killing 4 people. Just hearing the Macedonian language being spoken on the streets set the National Guard off on a shooting spree towards unarmed civilians. Such actions were unprecedented and more extreme than those of the Metaxas regime.

Here is what Petsi, the secretary of the Voden Region Peoples' Liberation Front (PLF), had to say;

“People from the Security Services detained Kosta Chorlinov and jailed him for speaking Macedonian. Petar Sarakinliev was also detained the same day and accused of openly speaking Macedonian in public. Sarakinliev was held in jail for 24 hours and released. He was beaten close to death. The millers Trajo Sapundzhiev and Tanas Akrepov were detained in their gardens at L'got by the National Guard and accused of speaking Macedonian. In a rain of bullets, Atanas Akrepov managed to escape while Trajo Sapundzhiev was taken away and put in jail where he was subjected to brutal torture. He was released six days later a cripple.” (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Misl, 1971, pages 157, 158)

On July 25, 1945 the National Guard flag bearer pulled out his pistol and fired at children he heard praying out loud in the Macedonian language at the Kjuprija neighbourhood in Voden.

Janis Perchemlis, Gerimdzhes and Fotiadis, well known collaborators and Fascists who spied for the Germans during the occupation, were seen pacing up and down the streets calling out loud “lists of those going to jail are already made”. In other words they were openly threatening the population with harm without naming names, clearly a terror tactic to frighten everyone.

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945 the Greek Gendarme located in the village Lukovtsi detained 4 girls from the same village. No reason was give. The girls were taken away to jail and placed under guard in the city of Sobotsko where they were subjected to torture. A few days later, 14 boys all under the age

of fifteen were also detained in Lukovtsi and beaten to death. This was a tragedy not just for their parents but for the entire community.

On August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945 the Fascist Socrates Tumanidis and his band of cut throats invaded the village Lukovtsi, detained 10 people and took them to the village Dragomentsi where they subjected them to beastly torture. Tortured the worst was Nikola Markov who in addition to being badly beaten had to endure hot eggs placed under his armpits and salt poured on his wounds.

On August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945 the Greek Gendarme detained and jailed 25 people from the village Sarakinovo. A Greek Captain from the nearby army base, together with several soldiers, raped a young Macedonian woman in the village Tresino in front of her father-in-law. In a beastly manner, Jovan Dokov from the village Pozhartsko was ferociously beaten and while still conscious was buried alive. In the village Strupino 13 houses were burned down. One of those houses belonged to Tasho Bojchev, a Macedonian resistance fighter. Bojchev's wife was killed and her body was thrown in the fire to burn. The same day Germanos Papadopoulos and his band of nationalists detained and killed 2 Macedonian boys.

In the summer of 1945 a band of well known occupier collaborators from Drama Region appeared in Lerin Region. Lead by the murderous Andon Chaush the band of nationalists took control of entire villages and sealed the doors of the Macedonian homes with wax so no one could get in or out. Macedonians were placed under house arrest overnight for at least 12 hours without an explanation. No one dared break the seal for fear of what might happen to them.

Members of the National Guard roamed the streets during the nights and broke into the houses of those jailed and abused and raped their wives and daughters. In the village Setina, National Guardsmen raped the young wives of two brothers. Another young woman was then taken to the barracks and repeatedly raped overnight. The next morning she was taken and surrendered to her relatives, half dead. One particular woman from the village of Petoratsi was targeted, because of her activities in the United Panhellenic Organization of Youth, and raped.

On July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945 members of National Guard from the 165 battalion raped 4 women in the village Gornichovo because their husbands were serving in the Yugoslav army. Rapes and robberies were also committed in the villages Gorno Kleshtina, Elovo, Sorovich and Rudnik.

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945 Balkanski, in a report to the leadership of the PLF, stated that the National Guard had stolen 250 sheep from the village Eksisu, 2 herds of sheep, 6 oxen and 6 pigs from the village Zelenich and one herd of sheep from the village Mokreni.

As the national election date in March 1946 approached terror and pressure on the Macedonian people increased dramatically. On March 5<sup>th</sup>,

1946 members of the National Guard jailed 10 people from the village Nered. They were all taken to court and without a shred of evidence, presented as members of the Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF) and of the National Liberation Army of Greece (NLAG). Similar events took place in the villages Neokazi, Popozhani, Boreshnitsa, and Sekulevo.

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1946 10 people from the village Petoratsi were sued in the Lerin court and were given 10 to 15 year prison sentences for accusations of being GNLF and NLAG members. Among those sued were Bitko Mijalev, Lazo Damjanov, Naso Zhinzov and Vasil Popov. Another 18 people from the village Setine were also sued by the same court and handed 8 to 10 year prison sentences. These people were accused of various crimes by the teacher Miltiadis Dulukas who was a witness at their trials.

Betrayed by Irimi Mechkari a number of people were picked up by the Ofchareni Gendarmes at 9 pm on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1946 and sent to jail. Among those jailed included were Dimo Kratev and Vane Alamchev from Krushoradi.

In a separate incident on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1946, the same Gendarme from Ofchareni, lead by collaborator and spy Janis Apostolidis, stormed into the village Krushoradi and abducted resistance fighters Petar Donevski, Pando Vesev, Spase Dzhodzhov and Gjorgij Majnov. The next day they were taken to Lerin and put in prison.

More Macedonians were rounded up and taken before the courts in Lerin, even decent resistance fighters like Jordan Vitkov who was sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour, Katerina Ts. Shabalova sentenced to 3 years imprisonment and Alekso Gashtarov, Sveto Charkev and Gjorgij Chakalov from the village Setina sentenced from 8 to 12 years imprisonment which prompted one to speak up and say “We are Macedonians and that is why it is not difficult that we must lie in prison. This is our tax for our freedom. The Macedonians are used to spending time in prison, but for us one day the sun will shine”. (Andonovski, Hristo. Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija. Skopje: Misl, 1971, page 161)

While rounding up resistance fighters the Gendarme was also looking to recruit new informants. This was done by intimidation or by bribes. Fearful for their lives some could not take the pressure and succumbed to the will of their torturers while others were willing to sell their services for a price. Among those who succumbed were Gjorgij Bukovski, Metodi Mechkarov, and Spase Rumelov all from the village Krushoradi. They became the new agitators for the nationalists and took on the role of spreading rumors and pitting neighbour against neighbour. They were also put in charge of dividing the relief aid donated by the United Nations Relief Agency. Unfortunately none of the relief aid was given to the

needy. Almost all of it was stolen by those in charge and sold in the black market.

Terror was not restricted to Voden, Meglen and Lerin Regions alone; it was widespread throughout all of Macedonia but more prevalent in the Western Region. There was massive terror and persecution against the Macedonian people in Kostur Region since Varkiza, prompting the Regional Council of the GNLF to list some of them in the bulletin “News of the Day” on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945 a National Guard band from the village Inon (Tsakoni) attacked the village Polipotamos and severely beat most of the villagers. After beating him to near death, Zhivko Poptrajanov was taken to Kostur for interrogation.

On May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945 a band of around 200 armed nationalist bandits from the villages Shijaki, Chetirok and Gorno Paprechko attempted to enter the village Polipotamos in order to plunder it. The villagers however did not succumb to fear and fought back with sticks and stones as they met the gangsters before reaching their village. The village came out victorious with only a single casualty. Lazo Antonopoulos was wounded.

On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1945 the same village was blockaded by the National Guard. This time guardsmen detained and beat many residents accusing them of being communists. Fifteen people were beaten to near death and the entire village was plundered and three flocks of sheep were stolen.

On May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1945 Andreas Papadopoulos with a group of 15 residents from the village Zagorichani, armed with rifles and wearing military uniforms blockaded the Macedonian part of the village and summoned all the Macedonians. Some were tied to a post and severely beaten with whips as they were forced to run like horses around the post and humiliated. Mitse Popjovanov, the village mailman, was beaten so badly that his life hung by a thread.

In May 1945 armed bands of nationalistic elements of Asia Minor settlers, who were settled in Macedonia by the Greek state in the 1920's, attacked the village Brest and stole a flock of 1,200 sheep. They stole all the flocks of sheep from the village Dolno Papretsko and about 300 sheep from the village Setoma. When the people from the robbed villages went to the Regional Governor in Kostur to complain, he kicked them out of his office and told them “to go to hell”.

In spite of GNLF numerous attempts to publicize the terror in an attempt to curb it, the ultra-nationalists continued to commit crimes unabated.

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945 Andreas Papadopoulos's band of nationalists attacked the village Breshtani, summoned all residents and began to indiscriminately beat them. Many, including three women, fell unconscious from the beatings. Lazar Panduli's wife was purposely undressed in public and while bare naked was raped by 4 of the bandits.

Afterwards they carried her off and locked her in a room until they found a donkey and then as she rode the donkey she was paraded through the village and further humiliated. When she was returned to lockup, the man responsible for guarding her felt sorry for her and let her escape.

On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945 Andrea Papadopoulo's nationalist band entered the village Tsakoni and committed all kinds of atrocities. Andon Sjula was badly beaten in an attempt to convert him to a turncoat so he could spy for them but they were unable to break him. He later died from the ordeal. Also badly beaten were Vasilis Suklidis, Naum Nartea, Andreas Stavridis and Petar Chocho.

Other thefts reported at the time included 5 heads of large livestock stolen from the village Tikveni by the nationalist Pavle Sjagari.

Other atrocities committed by the nationalists and the National Guard included the rape and execution of Dafina Valtova from the village Izglebi and the rape of 20 women from the village Gratsi.

Unrestricted nationalist bands went on committing crimes in Kukush and Drama Regions, spreading rabid terror wherever they set foot. Terrible tortures were committed in the village Postol, Enidzhe-Vardar Region, resulting in the death of 70 year old Poliakov. In Kukush Region a band of nationalists, lead by ex-German collaborator Kisabadzhak, indiscriminately rounded up and beat people, wounding 8. Andreas Georgiadis and Hristos Georgiadis were both wounded with a pistol blow to the head.

It is unfortunate that these brutal acts were committed against innocent civilians and will remain a black spot in the history of Greece but what is most unfortunate is the behaviour of the Bulgaris and Sofulis governments during 1945-1946 which praised these atrocities as acts of heroism committed in the defense of Greece.

Gumendzhisko Region is another place in the dark history of Greece where a long list of imprisonments, tortures, maltreatments and killings were committed against the Macedonian people. The following report entitled "Blockades, imprisonments and internments after Varkiza," was prepared by Hristo Balkanov leader of the PLF for Gumendzhisko Region. (Andonovski, Hristo. Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija. Skopje: Misl, 1971, pages 163 - 165)

## **Imprisoned**

On February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1945 18 citizens from the city Gumendzhe were jailed in Solun. Included among those jailed were Gjorgij Kostraki, Vangel Kostraki, Jovan Popnikov, Kostadin Korov, Trajko Kalinov, Hristo Michjorov, Hristo Hadzhigjoriov, Vangel Hr. Nichev, Dimitar Shaldev, Hristo Chjakov and others.

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1946 citizens Risto Kostarski, and Stamat Ljapa were sent to jail in Solun because they were accused of being under the influence of “Ohrana”, a Bulgarian sponsored organization that operated in Kostur Region.

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1946 imprisoned were Petros Hadzhikarmenis, Janis Hadzhikarmenis, Kostas Hadzhikarmenis, Janakis Kostas, Dimitar Uzunov, Hristo Uzunov, Stamat Stamenov, Todor Vaskov and Gligor Tumbov from the village Petgas. Among the 35 men and women interned from the village Kriva included were Vangel Janakev, Atanas Jankov, Jovan Ropkov, Tano Janakev, Jovan Mladev, Petar Hadzhikarmenis, Tano Tsegli, Hristo Sjagli, Gjorgij Janakov, Paskalina Mitrova, Anastas Karadzha, Elisabeta Gatsi, Katerina Stoju, Marika Pulka and others.

From January to August 1946 more than 100 citizens from Gumendzhe alone were imprisoned including members of the Menchev family. From the village Barovitsa imprisoned were Jovan Chutra, Hristo Sjuli, Hristo Ajta, Gjorgij Kjosev, Jovan Gata, Katina Kuta, the entire Vangel Shoshov family, Paskalina Garti and Gjorgij Todorov Shoshov. From the village Karpi imprisoned were Gjorgij Tekni, Hristo Pejkov, Hristo Kirkov, Hristo Kjoska, Gjorgij Kjoska, Gjorgij Dzharov, Gjorgij Popnikolov, Atanas Betov, Maria Beta, Aneta Benova, Gjorgij Erov, Aneta Tumba, Dimitar Popjanov and Jovan Popjanov. From the village Mandelevo 16 people were imprisoned, from Isiklar 50, from Boemitsa 15 and from Gorgopik 50.

## **Raped**

Four women were raped.

## **Killed**

After receiving information from informant Hristo Petsi, British soldiers, in June 1945 went in pursuit of Petar Stamenitov from the village Pendalofos and had him killed in the chestnut grove above the village Kriva.

On August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1945 army and Gendarme Greek nationalists killed Kosta Dzhina from the village Laka, Atanas Koroveshov from the village Smrdesh and Atanas Lubchev from the village Kastaneri. These individuals were executed in Krombi, Edindzhe-Vardar Region.

On November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945, upon their surrender by the collaborator Dimitar Dojara from the village Kastaneri, the National Guard executed Gjorgij Shashev from Kastaneri, Hristo G. Tartevev, Trifun Ajta, Dimitar Parlapanov, Hristo Gatsov, Gjorgij Gulev, Petar Karamutev and Aleksandar Vasilev from Kriva, Gumendzhisko Region. The executions took place in the Sehovo area near the village Barovitsa.

On August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1946 in the village Izvor executed were Hristo Sima and Vasilios Kustalidis.

On August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1946 in Gumendzhe the nationalists and gendarmes killed Gjorgij Hadzhipopov, Dimitar Karadzha from Gumendzhe, Kosta Popjanov from Karpi, Lazo Projchev from Gomendzhe, Gjorgij Tampov from Kastaneri, Petad Dautis, Jovan Shahsov, Trifun Minov, and Tano Mitachov from Karpi.

On September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1946 civilian nationalists aided by the Gendarme beat to death with sticks Janis Asaridis from Gerakona, Nikos Karamanlis and Janis Sideris from Aksiupolis.

## **Plundered and Burned**

On September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1946 a detachment of gendarmes and bandits entered the village Barovitsa and burned the houses of brothers Trifun and Gjorgij Kuplev and took 2 mules, 300 goats, cheese, butter and everything of value they could find. They did the same to Hristo P. Kurlev's house and to the houses and properties of Petar Ajta, Kosta Projchev, Tano Gatsev, Kosta Gatsev, Gjorgij Taratev, Jovan Kovachev, Hristo Cholakov and Gjorgij Poppetrov.

According to a report compiled by Petar Asprov, the Regional leader of the PLF for Prespa Region, on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1945 atrocities were also committed against the Macedonian people in Prespa Region.

On October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1945 a group of National Guardsmen blockaded the village Shtarkovo and imprisoned 7 Macedonians, who after been beaten were sent to Lerin. Among the 7 beaten included were Joshe Grozdanov, Bozhin Kostov, Pando Kostov and Stavre Katielov.

On October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945 the village Rudari was blockaded and 15 people were taken and sent to the Lerin jail. Joshe Tsaklarovski and Mihail Mihailovski were beaten to a state of unconsciousness.

Prespa Region remained under a state of terror from the moment Gizas and Sarandopoulos were appointed Police Chiefs in the villages Gjerman and Popli respectively, to the spring of 1947 when they were driven out by the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG).

This perpetrated terror horrified the people and weighed very heavily on those who had just liberated Greece from the German, Italian and Bulgarian occupiers only to hand it to a more ferocious enemy determined to destroy them. The peace loving Macedonians who wanted nothing more than to live as equals with the Greeks now once again became a target of ultra-nationalism. But in spite of the reality on the ground Greek authorities, who at the time were in control, made every effort to downplay the situation. Printing presses and radio stations were busy misinforming the public by putting the blame north of Greece's border. It was they that

were causing the problem and putting Greece's national integrity into jeopardy. The world however was wise to Greece and the best Greek reactionary propaganda could not stop the objective observers from expressing their own displeasure and repulsiveness regarding the atrocities committed by the pro-government nationalists and the organs of the government itself.

A British officer, who at the time was stationed in Greece, on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1947 made the following remarks for the newspaper "New Statesmen and Nation". In short he described the situation in Greece like this: "One week after the signing of the Varkiza agreement I witnessed the most horrific and antisocial behaviour committed by the newly formed National Guard made up from personnel from the former collaborators of the occupiers. Everyone who placed their faith in the word of the agreement (which the English had guaranteed) and did not leave in good time, were put in prison and mistreated. In an underground enclosure in the larger part of a kitchen in a small flat I saw 16 men, women and children. Two of the men were lying on the floor unconscious swimming in a pool of their own blood. Every prisoner had the right to go to the toilet only once in three hours and only for three minutes. An old man, because he was selling GNLF newspapers, was tied and beaten for an entire hour. None of the prisoners were informed as to why they were imprisoned. None of the prisoners were taken to court, sued and found guilty but were kept in prison for nine months. This was not an isolated situation during the time when not a single group of communists existed and not even a single leftist activity was taking place." (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Mislja, 1971, pages 166 - 167)

The newspaper "Daily Mirror" published an article written by a British soldier who personally had witnessed atrocities committed by the Greek Rightist forces. The article was illustrated with photographs showing people being tortured and beaten. There were photographs of mass slaughters and decapitations. There was even a photograph of a 16 year old decapitated girl. People's decapitated heads were shown to be carried as trophies hung on the saddles of horses or propped up on spikes.

The people who had suffered and died at the hands of these blood thirsty Greeks were Macedonians who had done nothing wrong except to have being born Macedonian.

Connie (Koni Ziljakus (sp?)) wrote that the official Greek government and the military which was organized by General Charles Ujakam, (sp?) a well known enemy of the communist ideology, well known from the time he was chief of the British military interventionist forces in the Soviet Union, were no better than the police and the gendarmes. "Four fifths of the forces in the official administration, in the courts and in the police are in the hands of these extremists. Surlas's bands ruled the province and had established their own administration. They are well armed and do what

they feel like.” (Andonovski, Hristo. Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija. Skopje: Mislal, 1971, page 167)

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1947, quoting British Colonel Shepard, the newspaper “New Democracy” wrote: “The backbone of the Royal Gendarme, making up Greece’s Security battalions today, consists mainly of German collaborators”.

Richard Mayer from the American Overseas Information Agency reported from Athens that “a large part of the former gendarme which a while ago served the Germans is now using the lists left by the Germans to oppress doubtful personalities...” (Andonovski, Hristo. Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija. Skopje: Mislal, 1971, page 167)

During 1946 a Commission made up of British Labour Representatives (Solej, Tifanis and Dode (sp?)), visited Greece and examined the political situation in some detail. Upon their return to their own country, on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1946 they announced that Greece is 90% Fascist, after which Laski, the former British President of the Labour party of Great Britain prophetically said: “The return of King George to Greece will convert this state into a second Spain...” (Andonovski, Hristo. Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija. Skopje: Mislal, 1971, page 168).

## **Terror Continues in Greek occupied Macedonia**

When the terrorized Macedonian people living in Greek occupied Macedonia thought that things could not possibly get any worse, they did. With the involvement of the Greek press in the vilification of the Macedonians, terror in Greek occupied Macedonia was reaching a new dimension and all this with Great Britain's blessing.

To hide the peoples' discontentment with the new situation and to justify the terror perpetrated against them, the Greek government invented the "Slav Threat". The propaganda machine and press were quick to pick up on this and place the blame for internal problems "outside" to the north. The Slav threat from the north became the rallying cry of the right to further punish the Macedonian people for wanting to be Macedonian and live as equals with the democratic Greeks. The "Slav threat from the North" was further exacerbated by a provocative speech Winston Churchill gave in the United States in 1946 and reinforced the idea in the frightened minds of the Greek people that indeed such a thread did exist. This manifestation of the rightist Greek imagination is today used as Greece's official history. Greeks today use this as an example of how Tito aspired to annex their so-called precious "Greek-Macedonia" to Yugoslavia.

The manifestation of the so-called "Slav threat" had two aims; (1) to frighten the Greek people and instill in them the thought that Greece will be attacked and destroyed by the Slavs from the north and (2) create an atmosphere of mistrust between the Macedonian and Greek people in order to destroy the close relationship they had formed during the struggle against the occupiers which was forged by the spilling of blood on both sides to free Greece. The Greek media further vilified the Macedonian people by linking them to the "Slav threat from the North" as being the agents who were to aid the Slavs from the north in the destruction of Greece. This no doubt was another "Greek policy of genocide" to root out and exterminate the remaining Macedonian presence in Greece. By falsely accusing the Macedonian population of acts of treachery the Greek government was hoping to turn the tide not only on eliminating communism in Greece but to also once and for all get rid of the Macedonian menace from Greece.

The Greek rightists had no moral or ethical problem with calling Macedonians "turncoats" and "collaborators" when they were not. The Greek rightists saw the Macedonians as vermin that needed to be exterminated so that Greece could be purified and they could bask in the glory of Hellenism. Here is what the rightist Greek newspaper "Elinikos Voras" # 114 had to say on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1945: "If they [Macedonians] are that much interested in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria we will not oppose them; we will give them to Yugoslavia and Bulgaria as a gift. They can take

them away and relocate them in their rich fields and let our side be cleansed. There are no more that 30,000 of them. Good riddance, they can go and leave us in peace. They are the weeds and stones of our society”. (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Mislja, 1971, page 169)

“Elinikos Voras” did not bother to hide or mask its wishes when it called on the Greek people to rise against the Macedonians and drive them out of their ancestral lands without delay. “Elinikos Voras” did not bother with legal and moral issues or with international rights afforded to the Macedonians when it called for genocide against the Macedonian population which had lived on those lands for many centuries.

“Elinikos Voras” in fact was so obsessed with the so-called phantom “Macedonian autonomous movement” and the so-called “Slav threat” from the north that it made it its most endearing theme to vilify the Macedonians by continuously publishing adventure stories and hypothetical scenarios of a non-existent enemy attempting to “grab” their Macedonia. In one of its columns on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1945 “Elinikos Voras” wrote: “We have information from a reliable source that Captain Amintas Avgerinos (I. Papadopoulos from the village Pesoshintsa) of the 28<sup>th</sup> ELAS (National Liberation Army of Greece or NLAG) brigade, in larger part composed of Slavo-Macedonians, does not recognize the Varkiza agreement, and has formed an armed group which now roams around the villages Pesoshintsa, Leskoves, Popozhani, Vrbenik, Kamenik and Voshtareni, where he is terrorizing the residents and forcing them to cross over to Bitola and to join the ranks of the Bulgarian detachments commanded by Ilija Dimovski - Gotse, who is fighting for Macedonia’s autonomy...” (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Mislja, 1971, page 169)

“Elinikos Voras” did not care to know or report the facts. All it cared about was to propagate hatred against the Macedonian people by continuously publishing fantasies.

Contrary to “Elinikos Voras’s” allegations, Amintas Avgerinos, did not send Macedonian fighters to join Ilija Dimovski – Gotse’s Macedonian brigade in the Republic of Macedonia. In fact Amintas Avgerinos was a disciplined NLAG officer and trusted member of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) who obediently followed the party line when the CPG itself was taking a stand against the Macedonian Liberation Movement Organization, the same organization that fought side by side with the Greeks to liberate Greece from the Germans and Bulgarians.

“Elinikos Voras” took it upon itself to label the Macedonian detachments as “having autonomous tendencies” knowing full well that the very same Macedonian detachments fought bloody battles against the autonomist counter-bands in Kostur and Lerin Regions and against the Bulgarian sponsored “Ohrana” in Voden Region.

By fighting against Greece's enemies, including the foreign sponsored autonomist organizations like the Ohrana, side by side with the democratic citizens of Greece, the Macedonian people clearly demonstrated their desire to live as equals with the Greeks, as Greek citizens and as recognized ethnic Macedonians. Anything outside of that is Greek propaganda, the same propaganda which today is offered as Greek history.

I also want to mention here that if anyone should be accused of having "autonomist ideas" it should be the British. It was no secret, at least not to the Macedonians, that during 1945-1946 the British government and Greek security forces through the political officer Bafas and through various collaborators of the occupiers were interested in creating an autonomous movement in Lerin Region. If anyone should be accused of irregularities it should be the British Vice-Consul Hill who was the one weaving conspiracies. This information was made available to the UN Inquiry Commission by Dr. Janidis, a Lerin Region doctor, in March 1947. It took a lot of courage on the part of Dr. Janidis to divulge this information and as a result of this he lost his life.

Another Greek nationalist newspaper that also fed the flames of hatred against this phantom "Slav threat" from the north was "Nea Alithia" which on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945 wrote: "Greece fought, suffered, sacrificed and today is victorious but it cannot ignore threats from the north..." (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Misl, 1971, page 170)

Yet another rightist Greek newspaper the "Ethniki Floga", an organ of Napoleon Zervas, a former occupier collaborator now under British influence, on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1946 waved another "Slav threat" flag giving Greek nationalists the signal to start terrorizing the anti-Fascist democratic citizens of Greece by printing the following: "The danger is patient and is always there. As long as Soviet Russia is not contained within its own borders the danger will lurk and make us uneasy threatening our lives and our country. As long as Russian watchtowers are closer than 30 km from the Aegean Sea they will continue to attack. With burning heat provided by their branches Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania the communists will burn our state because it is in their nature. There is only one way to escape this - full destruction of this banditry which breaks the law of justice and makes this treachery possible. The lozenge is war without hesitation or mercy. War until the enemy is transformed into food for vultures and wild beasts or it is in chains in the prisons from which there is no escape." (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Misl, 1971, pages 169, 170)

Attacks against the Macedonian people living in Greece from Athenian newspapers were just as vicious engaging in brutal anti-Macedonian campaigns through the newspapers "Elefteria" and "Elenikos Kirix". On January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1946 "Elefteria" published an open letter demanding the expulsion of all Macedonians from their native homeland. "The Slavo-

Macedonians can leave our Macedonia. They can go wherever they want. They need to disappear from here; they need to emigrate immediately and compulsorily. There is no place for them here.” (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Mislal, 1971, pages 171, 172)

In a similar tone the nationalist paper “Ethnikos Kirix” paved the way for conflict and for persecuting the Macedonians when it proposed, “that there is a need to get rid of 180,000 Slavo-Macedonians as soon as possible”.

Even stronger criticism against the Macedonians came from the newspapers “Foni tis Kastorias” and “Ethnos” when they published quotes from Periklis Ilijadis, a former Nazi collaborator, insisting that, “there is no place for Greeks and Macedonians in Greek-Macedonia”. (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Mislal, 1971, page 172)

In spite of the sacrifices the Macedonian people made to safeguard the security and integrity of Greece, the rightist elements of Greece were bent on destroying them. When they thought their situation could not get any worse, it did. If terrorizing and threatening them with death was not enough, the Greeks were now bent on exterminating the Macedonian people to the last one. The Macedonian people were now faced with a dilemma: remain at home and accept fate in the hands of the blood thirsty Nazi collaborators or forever leave their homes and ancestral lands and cross over the border? Out of the two evils, the Macedonians chose to remain at home and together with the democratic people of Greece, resumed their struggle for their freedom, equality and human rights for all.

The people had had enough of the lawlessness and brutality committed by the Greek nationalists and their armed wings the National Guard, armed bands and police. The very same sentiment was echoed by the world public which vehemently disapproved of how the Greek government and the British handled the situation.

The problems between the Greek government and the democratic people of Greece began with defeat of the Papandreou government in December 1944 and the signing of the Varkiza agreement on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1945 which basically robbed the left of its power. This is also the time when the British took advantage of the situation and stepped up their influence in supporting only those governments that supported the British agenda in Greece, which was to get rid of the communist menace. British Ambassador Leaper made sure governments that strayed were short lived. The government of General Plastiras, which inherited the Papandreou government was quickly toppled by the nationalists who had more influence in Greek affairs than the highest ranking politicians in the government. The reason for toppling the Plastiras government was because Plastiras during the Varkiza talks showed tolerance for the Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF) and for the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) which was contrary to British policy at the time. Also the Plastiras

government did not insist on the total disarming of the NLAG forces, but asked that only 42,000 rifles be surrendered.

Another and perhaps a more important reason for ousting Plastiras, a veteran of the Greek bourgeoisie, was British fear that he may postpone the time of the plebiscite for the return of the King in Greece which the British desperately wanted to bring back.

The leftists too, including the GNLF, were in some ways responsible for Plastiras's fall from power because of their harsh criticism regarding his inability to stop the regime's terror.

Ultimately however, it was the right which called for his resignation after accusing him of being a quitter, a Hitler-o-phil, etc., all because of a letter Plastiras had written earlier which spoke in favour of an agreement between Germany and the Metaxas regime. This information was made public by the newspaper "Ethnikos Kirix" on November 2, 1952.

The next government to take power in Greece, no doubt an obedient marionette of the British, was that of Admiral Vulgaris which cared less for Greek interests than it did to satisfy its national aims at any cost. This government was right oriented to the extreme and openly supported the extreme right royalists and chauvinistic elements. Instead of protecting the people from the extremists and chauvinists, this government reinforced the terror against the resistance fighters, the very same group of people which spilled blood to liberate Greece from the occupiers. This government was so chauvinistic it was accused by the democratic center of inciting white terror. This accusation received a rebuttal from General Damaskinos, under whose patronage the Vulgaris government was in power, who stepped in, in defense of the government on July 9, 1945 proclaiming: "There is no country in the world today that has a greater democracy than Greece. The printing press has all the privileges and freedom it needs and great effort is made to stop the country from breaking into a civil war."

Unfortunately the people on the receiving end of this terror did not see it the same way the Greek General Damaskinos saw it. It was during the time of the Vulgaris government that Greece experienced the greatest brand of terror ever witnessed in Greece which prompted Sofulis, another rightist Greek politician, to accuse this government of total disregard for security and for allowing the armed terrorist bands to exist and commit terror.

Sofulis's solution to the political crisis was to form a coalition national government in accordance with the conditions and criteria set in the 1938 Greek Parliament which called for excluding the Communist Party of Greece from achieving political power. Sofulis proposed this when the democratic left was asking for a proportionally representative government which was to include the CPG and its allies.

The idea to exclude the CPG from parliament was fully supported by the nationalists on the far right which were also calling for a commitment

to a referendum date to return the King to Greece. In this the rightists saw the Vularis government as a vehicle capable of fulfilling their desire. The far right also saw the Vularis government as a means of achieving its aims in liquidating its opposition through violence and terror.

Being a major power at the time, the left did not take the proposal to be excluded from Parliament too kindly and by letters complained to the Greek government and to the Great Powers (Great Britain, USA, the Soviet Union and France) about the treatment it was receiving. As if it was not bad enough that the government was breaking and abusing the Varkiza agreement to achieve its aims, it was now aiming to exclude the CPG and its allies from achieving their democratic rights. It absolutely made no sense to persecute NLAG fighters, the very same people who fought to liberate Greece and at the same time reward the former collaborators the very same people who were helping Greece's enemies to enslave it. This was unacceptable to the left and for that reason the GNLf asked the Great Powers to form a joint commission to investigate the situation and recommended the formation of a representative government, according to the principles of the Yalta agreement.

The Vularis government however did not last long enough to survive an investigation and collapsed on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945 mainly due to pressure from the left and from the democratic center. The Bulgarian government was succeeded by the Konelopoulos government which only lasted a short time to be succeeded by the formation of a government with "wide coalitional principles" and entrusted to none other than Temistocles Sofulis.

Unfortunately no middle ground could be found even in this government and the gap between right and left kept widening. The Sofulis government faced its first serious setback over the question of amnesty for those who had committed killings. During the time the Sofulis government was in power there were over 80,000 prisoners locked up in Greek jails. The government passed law 730/45 to stop arresting people for crimes committed from April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1941 to February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1946 except for those who had killed people. Unfortunately the various parties could not agree on the details. As a result only 5,535 prisoners were freed. Unfortunately while those few were released from the prisons many more were being arrested filling the prisons and swelling the concentration camps. It didn't matter how the law (730/45) was structured it was quickly circumvented by the rightists (including the police) who mobilized professional witnesses to falsely accuse those whom they wanted out of the way. Killings were fabricated, false witnesses were found and innocent people were fingered and sent to prison. Naturally this was done to eliminate the opposition and prevent a communist government from being elected. The rightists knew they had no hope in hell of ever coming to power by legitimate means through fair and free elections so they had to offset the

balance by frightening people not to vote for the communists. Unfortunately at the time the vast majority of the people (80%) would have voted for the CPG and for the people who not only assisted their survival during the German, Italian and Bulgarian occupation but who eventually liberated them. They were certainly not going to vote for the parties that put the occupier collaborators in power, the very same perpetrators who committed crimes against them.

In a private letter to Stalin in April 1945, Winston Churchill among other things wrote: "From Greece we ask nothing more than its friendship, independence and integrity. We have no inclination or a pressing need to install a monarchy or democracy. The political unity there consists of the normalization of things as soon as possible and to introduce decent and free elections in the next 4 to 5 months. These elections will decide which regime gains power and later what constitution will be drafted. The will of the people by peaceful means will decide the future of Greece, which is also our desire...." (K. Ziljakis)

This is what Churchill told Stalin but the British were doing exactly the opposite because that was the only way they could achieved their aims. Britain was prepared to do anything at any cost to hang on to Greece. But in hindsight no matter what the letter said, it was Stalin and Roosevelt in December 1943 at a conference in Texas, USA who gave Greece to Churchill. All three leaders agreed that Greece would remain under the British Sphere of Influence. The Lebanon protocol, which by the way was signed by representatives of the resistance movement (leftists) and by a delegation of the Greek government in exile, in May 1944, knew very well that Greece was going to be under British influence.

If that was not obvious then it should have become obvious when the Kazerta agreement was signed giving Churchill the right to intervene in Greece even if the Greeks were against it. This leads one to wonder "was the left sleeping" when all these agreements were signed?

It was easier to call what happened "a result of many mistakes" or "incompetence on the part of the CPG, GNLF and NLAG top leadership than to accept the idea that perhaps there was another and more sinister motive.

The fact is Greece was handed back to the British while more than 80% of its population supported the Communist Party of Greece. Britain wanted Greece back because it asked for it but Britain did not want the communists. So what was Britain to do? Well looking at the situation in hindsight the answer is easy. Destroy the communists! How, especially in view of powerful Russia, can one destroy the communists? The solution as we have witnessed was simple! Create the right conditions for a civil war and destroy the communists in battle.

I can surmise here that Britain wanted to destroy communism because it did not want problems in the future but to destroy communism it had to

destroy the desire of the people that would support communism in free and democratic elections. This is why the British supported the brutalities and measures of terror undertaken by the gendarmes, the National Guard and the nationalist armed groups in Greece. Instead of offering people a free choice to choose a government through democratic principles Britain chose the path of violence. This entire effort was supported to accomplish one thing; break the peoples' free will and frighten them into voting for a government that would serve British interests. Ernest Bevin the British minister of foreign affairs, who after the Greek elections of 1945 lead the British Foreign Office, during a Labour party conference in December 1944 complimented Churchill's policy on Greece by saying: "Britain cannot abandon its position in the Mediterranean".

While the British and the Greek press continued to speak of free elections in Greece, the nationalist and chauvinistic elements continued to rain terror on the civilian population arresting and imprisoning people uncontrollably. By the time of the elections (March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946) almost all of the former resistance fighters were either missing or serving jail sentences under trumped up charges.

Terror and persecution escalated before the elections and peaked on the day of the elections, prompting even Sofulis himself to say; "It is impossible to hold impartial elections under these conditions". Not only were people terrorized to vote for whom their tormentors wanted but there were also all sorts of other irregularities which were being ignored by the state apparatus. Interestingly some of these irregularities were confirmed by British colonel Shepard who was quoted by the newspaper "New Democracy" on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1947 as saying: "During the election a Greek officer was watching a British officer and finally got enough nerve to speak to him. The Greek officer boasted to the British officer how his regime was capable of creating conditions where 100% of the people would vote for the royalists. 'Even if not 100% then at least 95% and for those 5% who vote differently we will call them the enemies of the regime and invent reasons as needed to bring them in' explained the Greek officer."

The March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946 Greek elections were a total farce not only because of the coercion by the rightist regime forcing voters to vote for them but also because of the perpetrated election fraud. In most European countries like France, Italy and others the population had naturally shrunk because of the war but not in Greece. In spite of the half million deaths due to starvation and war, Greece, according to the number of people that voted in 1946, showed a massive population increase much greater than that which voted in 1936. For example 1,753,000 voters participated in the 1936 elections and 2,200,000 voters participated in the 1946 elections (voting in Greece was mandatory). Above that another 250,000 voters,

known democrats were intentionally left out from the lists so they could not vote.

It is true that these elections were monitored by international observers but all of the observers were from the west. There were no observers from the East or from the Soviet Union. Most of the western observers could not follow what was going on and those who did kept quiet about the irregularities. How could the observers have known that the dead had risen to vote in Greece and that the voting lists were much longer than the number of voters in the voting districts?

In spite of all the cover-ups some stories did manage to leak like the one about Frances Becker, son of British Minister Noel Becker whose name was on the voter's list even though he had no legal right to vote in Greece. A French reporter named Utrilo was also curious whether he could vote in the Greek election. He was not only granted his wish but according to his own admission he was also allowed to vote twice.

Given the terror conditions under which the elections were planned, the GNLF coalition decided to abstain from taking part in the March elections and when the ballots were counted only 9.5% of the total vote was cast for the left. Unfortunately such a decision not only cost the GNLF and its coalition partners parliamentary representation but at the same time they were accused of abandoning the legal and parliamentary path to power in favour of gaining power by illegal armed acts and subversive activities.

Abstaining from the elections also contributed to the return of King George II to Greece.

## **Macedonians and the start of the Greek Civil War**

Most historians would argue that the Greek Civil War began on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1944 with the bloody demonstrations in Athens when the police opened fire and killed a number of demonstrators. But it would be more appropriate to attribute the beginning of the Greek Civil War to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946 the day of the elections, the day when, instead of voting, many Partisans re-armed and rebelled against the Greek Government.

The rebellion manifested itself as an attack on the Greek right which began in the village "Lithohorion", situated in Thessaly east of Mount Olympus directly south of Katerini. Other attacks soon followed and in no time the conflict escalated into a full scale war, engulfing not only Greece but also Greek occupied Macedonia.

In a bizarre turn of events, the National Liberation Army of Greece (NLAG), which less than a year before had turned their guns on Macedonian fighters, now regrouped as the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) and extended its hand in friendship. It seems that all was forgiven and forgotten when the former NLAG leadership asked the Macedonians for their help. This time they came with offers of "equal rights", "recognition" and even possibilities of "re-unification with the Republic of Macedonia".

Many Partisan fighters from Greek occupied Macedonia who had crossed over into the Republic of Macedonia the year before got their chance to return home. On their return they organized themselves under a new organization bearing the name the Macedonian National Liberation Front (MNLF).

Many Macedonians were well aware of the saying "beware of Greeks bearing gifts" and knew that the Greek offer was too good to be true. But there was always that small ray of hope that perhaps this time the outcome for Macedonia might be different. Besides, their families, homes and lives were in Greek occupied Macedonia. What other choice did they really have? They returned because they were lonely, loved their families and because they had to live with the guilt of having to leave their loved ones in dire straits. Every Macedonian born in Macedonia, even in the most desolate places, knows the feeling of homesickness and yearns to return.

The new alliance between DAG and MNLF opened many opportunities for the Partisans beyond the Greek borders. While the Greek government controlled the big cities and towns, Partisan strength was in the villages and mountains. Most of the Partisan recruits came from the peasant population and showed themselves to be idealistic, hopeful and determined to fight. Camps were set up in mountainous seclusion where new recruits were given combat training. There were also training camps and supply depots set up outside of Greece, in Albania and Yugoslavia. One such camp was the town of Bulkes located in northern Yugoslavia.

Bulkes was a beautiful town with neat rows of lovely houses and fertile lands that could feed an army. The Germans had built Bulkes to house German families. After the German armies retreated, some residents of Bulkes were kicked out while others left voluntarily. The empty town was loaned to the Partisans to use as a supply depot for warehousing food, medical supplies, uniforms and weapons. Bulkes was also a training center for officers and an administrative center for propaganda. During the Partisan days the town of Bulkes was administered in the true spirit of democracy.

The introduction of the new MNLF in April 1945 in Greek occupied Macedonia naturally did not go unnoticed. Greek Royalists, Republicans and even members of the Greek democratic movement immediately began their attacks calling it a reactionary and military organization and accusing it of having aims to break away Greek occupied Macedonia from Greece.

The extreme rightists wasted no time in connecting the MNLF with the "Slav Threat" from the north. In fact in view of this they called for more abuse of the Macedonian people. Now more than ever rightists felt justified in their abuses of the Macedonian people.

If there is anything to be said about any threats it should be said that, as mentioned earlier, it was the British consulate in Lerin, Vice-Consul Hill, Captain Evans and the Greek Colonel Bafas who were responsible for inspiring intrigues resulting in the torture of many Macedonians in Lerin Region. But that was not all. Besides their irresponsible conduct in Greek occupied Macedonia these particular individuals, no doubt with British support, were also attempting to destabilize the Republic of Macedonia by interfering in its affairs.

What really makes no sense however is how the very top resistance leaders in Greece reacted to all this, particularly after the signing of the Varkiza agreement. This was a critical time, a time for clear thinking yet the very top resistance leaders, particularly Nikos Zahariadis, made questionable decisions. In retrospect I can't help but feel that there was more to it than meets the eye and I can't help but feel that there was a sinister plan brewing behind Zahariadis. Was Zahariadis a Greek hero or a Greek traitor, a question that has yet to be answered?

In retrospect I can say with certainty that Zahariadis was definitely a Greek hero for the victors, the Royalists and Republicans, because he accomplished two things for them; (1) he destroyed the communists and (2) he exterminated the Macedonians. To the Macedonians however Zahariadis was a traitor.

It cannot be a coincidence but a deliberate plan when both the British and rightists Greeks got exactly what they wanted and all this was accomplished by Zahariadis and his personally appointed incompetent followers.

Was it not Markos Vafiadis, one of Zahariadis's own generals, who at his own trial confessed that the communists in Greece of whom Zahariadis was in charge, succeeded in exterminating the Macedonians in a matter of a few short years, a task the entire Greek state could not do for decades? This should speak volumes to those who are willing to listen.

Was Zahariadis a double agent working for both Stalin and Churchill? Some people seem to think so. In retrospect certainly certain behaviour seem to point in that direction but the truth is obviously hidden somewhere in the British archives.

Thanks to Zahariadis, while the entire world was taking steps forward providing human rights and freedom to minorities, Greece took a step backwards by taking those rights away.

As I mentioned earlier, members of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) as well as members of the Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF) were not happy with the appearance of the new MNLF. It seems that the CPG leadership was unsure of what had happened at Varkiza and afterwards, while experiencing denial of its capitulation to the British, Zahariadis showed his true hypocritical colours by offering the Macedonians equal rights and self determination and so soon after accusing them of being separatists.

Knowing full well what the British had planned for the communists and what the rightist Greeks had planned for the Macedonians, Zahariadis had to be completely incompetent or a brazen traitor to again compel Macedonians to join him in a losing fight. Knowing full well that the "new Greece" would never recognize the Macedonians, Zahariadis enticed them to join his staged fight with promises of equality, human rights and ethnic recognition. This was indeed Greek hypocrisy at its best because, by their own involvement in the Second World War, the Macedonian people had already earned the right to self determination and did not need to spill more blood. But Zahariadis's real aims it appears were hidden and all he wanted to do was destroy the Macedonians by pitting them against the Greek army.

But looking at the problem another way "what choice did the Macedonians really have?" Surrender to the rightists and be exterminated was not really a practical choice. The choice obviously was to stand up and fight and hope for a better outcome!

Passive resistance was not an option so the Macedonians chose to fight but now more than ever had no illusions about their future with the Greeks. Even Captain Evans was aware that the Macedonians did not trust the Greeks and would have opted for separating from Greece if given a choice.

"Captain P. H. Evans – an agent of Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE), who spent eight months of 1943-44 in western Aegean Macedonia as a British liaison officer (BLO) and station commander- described the attitude 'even of educated Greeks towards the Slav [speaking

Macedonian] minority’ as ‘usually stupid, uninformed and brutal to a degree that makes one despair of any understanding ever being created between the two people’.” (p. 145, Andrew Rossos, “Macedonia and the Macedonians A History”).

“As Captain Evans emphasized: ‘[Western Aegean Macedonia] ..is predominantly a Slav region, not a Greek one. The language of the home, and usually also the fields, the village street, and the market is Macedonian, a Slav language... The place names as given on the map are Greek,...but the names which are mostly used ...are...all Slavic names. The Greek ones are merely a bit of varnish put on by Metaxas...Greek is regarded as almost a foreign language and the Greeks are distrusted as something alien, even if not, in the full sense of the word, as foreigners. The obvious fact, almost too obvious to be stated, that the region is Slav by nature and not Greek cannot be overemphasized’”. (p. 147, Andrew Rossos, “Macedonia and the Macedonians A History”).

Fully or perhaps not at all aware of their predicament the Macedonian people, lead by the MNLF, were compelled to fight on two fronts; (1) against the unruly nationalists supported by the Greek government and (2) against those leftists that were prejudiced against them. As one fighter who happens to be a relative of mine put it, “if you fought in the Greek Civil War you best be sure your identity was kept a secret or else you never knew where the fatal bullet was going to come from; front or back.”

Five months after the MNLF was formed it experienced two serious fatalities. On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945 two Macedonians, members of the MNLF leadership, Atanas Koroveshovski, member of the main leadership, and Kosta Dzhina, member of the Enidzhe-Vardar Region leadership, were killed by the Greek National Guard.

They were near the village Kornoshor, in Pajak Mountain when they were surrounded by the Greek National Guard and by a unit of British Soldiers. The Macedonians fought back gallantly but were decimated in this uneven battle.

Two months later on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945 nine more Macedonians; leaders of the MNLF were killed. The men were sleeping inside a barn when they were attacked. The barn was located about two hours walk outside of the village Barovitsa on Pajak Mountain. The place was well known to former German collaborator Dujama who lead a detachment of the National Guard from the village Barovitsa right to it. The men killed were Gjorgij Giuda, Gjorgij Shasov, Gjorgij Trifunov Shasov, Trifun Ajtov, D. Parlapanov, Gjorgij Tartov – all from the village Borovitsa, Gumendzhensko Region, G. Karlov from Baltovo, Aleko Vasilev from Gumendzhe and P. Tufa or Karmata from Kriva.

The Greek nationalist press tried to make a big deal of how the brave National Guardsmen fought a bloody battle against the so-called “autonomists”. Nothing however was mentioned about the National

Guard's cowardly act of shooting these men in cold blood from the waist up and not allowing an autopsy to be performed even after it was requested by the Solun leadership of the Greek National Liberation Front's (GNLF) coalition.

In spite of external pressures the MNLF continued to widen its activities among the Macedonian people in the villages and cities and fought its battles heroically. The Macedonian organization was becoming a real factor in the day to day political and economic life of the Macedonian people in Voden, Enez-Vardar, Gumendzhisko, Lerin and Kostur Regions. As more Macedonians joined its ranks in Kajmakchalan, Pajak and Vicho Mountains it again began to take the shape of a formidable force that even the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) could no longer ignore. Surprisingly however, instead of attacking the MNLF with the usual vitriolic anti-Macedonian propaganda, the CPG took a neutral role. It seems the CPG did not want to further discredit itself in the eyes of the Macedonian people and risk doing more damage to the democratic division in Greece.

With regard to the MNLF's activities in Greek occupied Macedonia here is what Pavle Rakovski, one of the MNLF's main leaders had to say: "More than 70% of the young workers in Voden are active in Macedonian Youth Organizations. They are hoping to take over the worker management centers and through them organize strikes in the various factories. The CPG is uneasy about our success but as a legal party it has the authority to conduct strikes without being blocked by the government." (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Misla, 1971, page 186)

"We have on our side most of the skill workers and about half of the farming workers. The greater part of our cadres in the MNLF are Macedonians who formerly worked for the CPG. It is interesting to note that the CPG and GNLF are now coming to us, to the MNLF to ask for material support and to be welcomed in the Macedonian villages and homes. Since Varkiza most Greek villages changed sides mostly due to pressure from the nationalists." (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Misla, 1971, pages 186 and 187)

As the year 1946 rolled in, Macedonians began to notice a change in attitude in the CPG towards the Macedonians and the MNLF. This new attitude was revealed in the comments made by Provincial CPG secretary for Macedonia Leonidas Stringos when he said: "The conditions are now right for unity and understanding between Macedonians and Greeks, a unity that was damaged by Varkiza. Let's follow the MNLF call to unite and stand on the side of the workers and fight united against Fascism as we did during the resistance struggle. Let us smash the regime run by former quislings and elect our own representatives in government with the participation of the CPG and the GNLF. Let's move forward united for a

peoples democracy. If the MNLF is consistently disposed to follow this line then there is no obstacle why we shouldn't cooperate and work together".

(The above quote was extracted from the document "Protoporos" (vanguard), a monthly organ of the CPG for Macedonia and Thrace, Solun February 7, 1946. entitled "Our Fight for Democracy and the Slavo-Macedonian Question" page 9)

Another article, written in the same spirit, by CPG member Vasilis Bardzhotas entitled "Our Ideological Front", states: "In the last days a trial was convened in Voden against the MNLF where three people were sentenced to death, and the rest were charged with heavy penalties. If the trial proved anything it proved that the MNLF is the GNLF of the Slavo-Macedonians which is calling for equality within the framework of the Greek peoples' democracy, and for the protection of the sovereignty and independence of Greece..." ("Komep", December 1946)

Directed at the CPG membership Bardzhotas, among other things, made the following comments: "Our party [the CPG] must help the Slavo-Macedonians who have suffered the most by any means possible. We need to explain to the people of Northern Greece not to be afraid of the MNLF. We need to explain that the MNLF is not an autonomous organization and that the slanderous propaganda calling it autonomous is directed to dividing the population and preventing a united brotherhood between the Greek population in Macedonia and Thrace and the Slavo-Macedonian element. We need to dispel the theory of the "Slavic Threat" and of the fictitious autonomous movement created by British agents in Macedonia..." ("Komep", December 1946)

In a hypocritical sense, even Nikos Zahariadis, the CPG General Secretary spoke positively about the MNLF. During the December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1945 General Assembly of the Provincial Committee for Macedonia and Thrace, speaking about a flyer published by the Voden branch of the MNLF, Zahariadis, among other things said: "Every Greek democratic citizen, I am sure, will agree with the call of the MNLF from Voden Region, to fight together for our freedom, for political rights and social equality and for a general amnesty. We will struggle together for our bread, our freedom and for a new Greek democracy." (Quote taken from the Newspaper "Laiki Foni", organ of the CPG for Macedonia and Thrace, Solun, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1945.)

It seems that the change in attitude on the part of the CPG towards the MNLF is owed mainly to the CPG's need to reorganize for a new armed struggle against the Greek right. A new armed struggle at this point was not possible without involving the Macedonians. The call for a new struggle was made during the December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1945 CPG General Assembly mentioned earlier when the slogan "We call on the people wherever they are, in the cities and in the villages, to carry out an armed

struggle against the reactionaries” was first introduced. (“Laiki Foni”, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1945)

Too many mistakes had been made by the left in allowing the right, more commonly known as the Republicans and Royalists, in Greece to hijack power and abuse the innocent to no end. For the leftists more commonly known as the democrats, there was little choice left but to fight back; this time for their own survival.

As shown previously, the first Greek government elected on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946 was a result of non-participation on the part of some democratic organizations and as a result of the right extremists applying pressure, coercion and terrorizing the democratic population. But no sooner had Tsaldaris’s government gained power than the Republicans and Royalists resumed and even stepped up their terror activities against the democratic population. It seems that the population was given no choice but to stand up and fight back.

This very same democratic population which fought and ousted the German, Italian and Bulgarian occupiers found a similar enemy in the home grown pro-government Greek National Guard and Gendarmes which not long ago collaborated with the occupiers.

Terrorist activities against the population peaked on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1946 when the Greek government voted to take “extraordinary measures” to further deprive the people of their rights by prohibiting political and professional organizational activities and by openly moving towards reinstating a military dictatorship.

In view of the MNLF and its activities, these “extraordinary measures” were particularly brutal against the Macedonians who were now being treated more harshly than the citizens of southern Greece. By treating the Macedonians differently and by accusing them of having “separatist tendencies” the regime was promoting division between the democratic people. Here is a quote of “article one” from the “extraordinary measures” adopted on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1946: “Those who aim to partition a section of the national territory or create opportunities to conspire inside this country or take part in them will be sentenced to death...” (Quote taken from the newspaper “Makedhonia”, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1946)

Ironically these measures were only a pretext to attack the innocent Macedonians and not the real conspirators; the British consulate in Lerin, Vice-Consul Hill, Captain Evans and the Greek Colonel Bafas who started this conspiracy in the first place.

The “extraordinary measures” were immediately put into effect and the courts were transformed into death factories in which tens of real patriots, the ones who spilled blood and freed Greece from the occupiers, were sentenced to death on a daily basis. All one had to do was accuse someone of “committing subversive activities against the state” and the military did the rest.

“Article ten” of the “extraordinary measures” allowed for the searching of premises at all times. This part of the law was utilized to justify the brutal measures taken against innocent people in response to press allegations of conspiracies. Names of so-called “autonomists” were printed and people were pursued by state organs without the slightest proof of wrong doing.

While the Greek parliament was voting to pass the “extraordinary measures” the newspaper “Makedhonia”, published the following:

“Our competent government officials have uncovered concrete information that proves that in the first 15 days of June disorder of a revolutionary character was taking place, which spread throughout the entire region of Macedonia, both inside and outside of cities. According to government sources, bandits who entered the villages and are concentrating their forces have been advised to act on a moment’s notice. We have information that these orders came directly from the MNLF whose long term objectives are to free Macedonia from the Greek yoke and proclaim it a “Peoples’ Republic” and then join it with Tito’s federation of Peoples’ Republics.” (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Mislal, 1971, pages 190 and 191). This well planted Greek propaganda, by the way, today serves as the “Greek side” of the story.

With this well fabricated, well planned and well executed program along with the use of well paid “professional witnesses” the Greek government managed to send thousands of Macedonians, sometimes entire families, to the Greek concentration prison camps in the waterless and parched Greek islands not to mention the many that Greece senselessly sentenced to death and executed. Among the many executed were six high ranking Macedonian MNLF cadres one of them Mirka Ginova sentenced to death by the military court in Enidzhe-Vardar.

The campaign against the MNLF was becoming fiercer by the day especially in the spring of 1946 after the appearance of the Macedonian detachment in Kajmakchalan. The detachment’s rapid growth was seen as a threat to the Republican and Royalist control of Greek occupied Macedonia and they took immediate action to liquidate it. Gendarmes from Western Meglen were dispatched in pursuit and one day in the middle of July 1946, when the detachment was taking a rest near the village Pochep, it unexpectedly came under attack from three sides. Over 500 gendarmes were involved and in view of such an overwhelming force the Macedonians decided it was wise to retreat. Unfortunately during the withdrawal a group of seven people, leaders of the MNLF, who that day were having a conference, were left behind and mistakenly took the wrong route to escape. During their retreat they ran into the enemy and were captured alive. Of the seven only Mirka Ginova was armed with a pistol. As the seven were rushed by enemy soldiers, Mirka fired all her rounds

and in frustration threw the pistol at the soldiers. Among the seven was also a Greek. All seven were taken to the city of Voden.

Mirka Ginova's capture was touted as a big success for the Republicans and Royalists. To demoralize her and the Macedonian people, the gendarmes had her dressed in rags and paraded through the streets as a scarecrow. But this fiery revolutionary walked with her head up and saluted onlookers calling on them not to cry for her. "Mothers don't cry the revolution will be victorious!"

A local woman, wife of Andon Shulov, who lived near the gendarme station in Voden, afterwards reported that for three nights in a row a motorcycle was left running just outside the station under Mirka's cell to mask Mirka's screaming. Mirka had been severely tortured by the gendarmes using middle age inquisition methods. Several times she was lead to the city cemetery and buried in an open grave up to her neck. She was then fired at with blank shells to frighten her to disclose information on activities and on people in her organization's network. Even after all that torture Mirka told them nothing.

On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1946 Mirka and the other six (Gjorgij Projev, Petre Popdimitrov, Risto Stojanov – all from Voden, the Greek Alekos Mutsakis from the village N'te, Mitse Ljumbata from Vlahovo and Tomo Mihailov from Teovo), were taken to a military court in Enidzhe-Vardar where they were sentenced to death. Mirka's words in her defense will remain a testament for the Macedonian people from Greek occupied Macedonia. To her last breath Mirka defended the MNLF and all Macedonians from the slanders of her captors. "I am a leader of the MNLF" said Mirka before the court" and during the occupation I fought against the Germans and the executioners Kalchev and Dimchev, who jumped upon us like beasts, especially against us Macedonians so that they could mislead us into the claws of 'Ohrana'. We fought the Ohrana with fanaticism, just as we fought against the German occupier. MNLF is not a military organization; it is a political Democratic Macedonian organization, which is struggling for equal rights for our people within the framework of the Greek State. We are fighting for freedom and democracy!"

Mirka Ginova was killed execution style by a firing squad early in the morning of July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1946. Mirka never lost her composure or spirit during the entire episode.

The court case against the MNLF leaders was well publicized by many newspapers and news agencies worldwide. Human rights activists through the United Nations tribunal branded the Greek regime undemocratic and came to Mirka's defense. Mirka was the first woman in Greece to be sentenced to death by a military court for her political beliefs. Her brave stand even touched her antagonists prompting a military writer to write an anonymous letter to Mirka's father which among other things said that

Mirka was a true revolutionary and very brave especially when facing the firing squad.

“At six o’clock this morning, with sorrow, Irina (Mirka) lost her life. I salute you for the daughter you brought up. She met death with a smile on her face, bravely singing and bringing amazement to all present... She was marvelous, resolute and showed no discouragement not even in the face of death. It was the same with the other six but mostly with Mirka. I am not writing to you just to praise your daughter; I am writing to you to tell you the truth as I witnessed it...” (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Mislal, 1971, page 194)

This rare heroism could have been recognized by the enemy, but the enemy did not want to credit the MNLF or the Macedonian people for having such brave and courageous leaders. But instead an otherwise dry-announcement was made by the supreme headquarters of the regular army which among other things said: The executed seven met their execution bravely refusing blindfolds. The greatest bravery was shown by the teacher Irini Gini (Mirka Ginova), who was singing and chanting slogans before her death.

Attacks against the Macedonians were not isolated or restricted to Voden Region. The Republicans and Royalists also attacked MNLF targets in Lerin Region where several MNLF cadres were killed. After the March elections a new brand of terror was engulfing Western Greek occupied Macedonia and no one was being spared. The villages Chereshnitsa, Gabresh, Biraltsi, Bukovik and others were mercilessly attacked.

At six o’clock in the morning on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1946 the army and police from the villages Dmbeni and Gabresh attacked the village Chereshnitsa, using grenade launchers and machineguns. After burning several barns they gathered the entire population in the village square and began to beat people with sticks and metal rods. Thirteen people were beaten unconscious. Among them were Hristo Markov, Vasil Palev, Hristo Andreev, Vasil Skivinov, Poptrajanov and Andon Terziev. Dimitar Anastasov was captured while working and taken to the village Gabresh where he endured prolonged beatings until he was dead. Afterwards his body was taken out of the village, doused with gasoline and burned. This was the second attack against the village Chereshnitsa. The village was also attacked three days earlier on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1946 and the following people were abducted and sent to the island of Corfu concentration prison camps: Lambrovitsa Popfilipova, Marko Vivkov and Filip Palev. They were punished because they were relatives of people who illegally fled the country.

Others who were jailed and tortured included Ivan Kizov from the village Gabresh. Unfortunately Ivan Kizov could not withstand the torture he received and died in prison the same night he was jailed. His body was taken and tossed in front of the door of his house and left there. The next

day the police jailed Lena Makrieva, Nikola Rompov and Hristo Robov, no reasons were given. Seventy people, fifty women and twenty men, from the village Biraltsi were turned in by the village informer Minche Shpirov. They were detained, locked up and severely beaten by the army and gendarme.

On July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1946 the army, stationed in the village Breznitsa attacked the village Besfina and jailed the following people: Dimitar Skenderov, Ristana Skenderov, Gjorgij and Yane Skenderov. The next day the army captured and violently tortured Donka Dukova, after which she was taken to Lerin and jailed.

The following women from the village Rabi, Prespa Region, were tortured and also taken to the Lerin jail: Sevasti Dimitrova, Barbara Kalkova, Metoditsa Jakreva, Mitrovitsa Dimitrova, Stojantsa Dimitrova, Joshevitsa Nikolova and Sofija Bajlova. The following people were also jailed in the same prison on August 1, 1946: Vezo Karavanov, Ilija Nichov, Done Lazarov, Mitre Gogov and Ilija Srbinov. Also locked up were many residents from the villages Bukovik, Oshchima, German, Orovnik and Orovo.

According to press reports, during the months of May, June, July and August 1946, 5,246 people were killed, 415 heavily wounded, 1,446 tortured, 1,246 interned and 3,290 imprisoned. During the same period over 20,000 Macedonians fled Greece.

## Consolidation of the Democratic Forces

Even though the entire year of 1946 was spent under attack from the Royalists and Republicans and Parliament annulled the Varkiza Agreement on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1946, Nikos Zahariadis, as a leader of the democratic movement, kept making questionable decisions. While the former resistance fighters and democratic citizens of Greece endured gangster like attacks from the police, National Guard, pro-government nationalistic elements, military organizations and former enemy collaborators, Zahariadis was still giving the impression that he could wiggle his way into power and make all those bad things go away.

While Zahariadis kept inventing excuses for his party's impotence the democratic people of Greece kept suffering to no end. Unable to trust either side, the Macedonian people again regrouped under the Macedonian National Liberation Front (MNLF) and began to fight back.

Immediately after the March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1946 elections, when it was made abundantly clear to everyone that the elections in Greece were neither fair nor democratic, many Macedonian small groups re-armed and took to the mountains, Kajmakchalan, Pajak and Vicho, not only to save themselves but to fight back and provide protection for their families and villages. MNLF detachments lead successful battles in several villages including Lukovits in Voden Region and Sarakinovo in Lerin Region. Thousands of Macedonians expressed their readiness to fight for freedom in Greek occupied Macedonia and many more were prepared to leave the ranks of the regular army and join the Partisan units. The first fighters to show desire to abandon the regular army and cross over to the Partisans were a group of soldiers from a unit stationed in the village Pondokersija in Kukush Region. Similar desires were expressed by a group of men from the 5<sup>th</sup> division stationed in Kozheni. When the Greek authorities found out, the men were court-martialed by a military court which sentenced 14 soldiers and 1 officer to death, 22 soldiers received life imprisonment and 23 others were handed down lesser sentences. All the above mentioned soldiers were accused of cooperating with the Partisans. (Vradini, December 6, 1946)

Despite what was happening to its membership the top leadership of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG), with Zahariadis at the helm, rejected the call to arms as a defensive reaction to the political crisis in February 1946 and instead opted for a peaceful resolution. For this Zahariadis was severely criticized by the majority during the CPG's 7<sup>th</sup> plenum in 1957. In fact during this general assembly most of the criticism was directed at Zahariadis, who during the February 1946 2<sup>nd</sup> plenum, a critical time for the resistance movement, rejected the call to arms for defensive purposes. It appears that Zahariadis was either completely incompetent or was expecting a different outcome than the one the

majority of the CPG envisioned. From what we know, it appears that Zahariadis did not want to renew the armed struggle and only wanted to use it as a bluff to make political gains. Here is what Panajotis Mavromatis, the Political Commissar for Macedonia and Thrace had to say: “After the 2<sup>nd</sup> plenum we wanted to study the situation and figure out how long it would take to mobilize our forces and how many could we mobilize. According to the report our Political Commissar gave to Zahariadis, we could mobilize 20-25,000 fighters in a month’s time. Zahariadis at that time told us that mobilization would not be necessary but those figures would be used as a political bluff against the opposition.” (“Neos Cosmos”, No. 4-5, April and May 1957)

As was discussed in the 1957 plenum, many believed that if a general mobilization took place in 1946 there would have been a much higher probability of securing a victory because the government at the time had only 5 divisions of 2,000 soldiers each and was in possession of only 150 machine guns. (General Zafirpoulos “O antisimorijakos agon” page 220)

Had Zahariadis at the time agreed to mobilize, the resistance would have, if not secured an outright victory, had some leverage in obtaining a more desirable political solution. Unfortunately by not mobilizing at that point Zahariadis left the resistance weak while the government was allowed not only to mobilize its forces but to further weaken the resistance movement with its terror tactics.

These questionable decisions on the part of Zahariadis and his followers not only further weakened the CPG but gave its general membership good reason to mistrust its leadership.

But despite the apparent indecision on the part of the CPG and on account of the grim political situation in Greece, the resistance movement began to strengthen especially in the ranks of the MNLF, which at the time was shaping up to be the leading organization of the resistance movement in the entire country. This must have been seen as a dangerous development by the CPG top leadership and counter measures had to be taken. But how? The Greek part of the resistance movement at the time did not have the strength to attack the MNLF and outright destroy it militarily and by now the Macedonians were immune to Greek vitriolic political criticisms, so the only method left was to join it. As the old saying goes, if you can’t beat them join them and by complimenting and calling the MNLF patriotic and fighters for human, social and political rights, the CPG came on board. Then about two months after the plebiscite was taken and King George Galesburg was returned to Greece, on October 28, 1946, the CPG and its partners announced the formation of the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG).

Surprisingly and despite their experiences with the CPG, the MNLF leadership decided to join forces with the Democratic Greeks. This decision was made just before the announcement of the formation of DAG

during a meeting between the main MNLF leadership and the Political Commissar for Macedonia and Thrace. The idea here was to resurrect the National Liberation Army of Greece (NLAG) and join forces under a new name; Democratic Army of Greece (DAG). This arrangement was made on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1946 and called for one member of the MNLF to be appointed to the headquarters of DAG for central and western Macedonia. That appointment was given to Gjorgij Urdov – Chocho. Two other appointments of Macedonians were also promised to be made; one to Political Commissar for Macedonia and Thrace and the other to MNLF representative at the CPG.

After the consolidation of the Macedonian and Democratic Greek forces the Greeks managed to keep just one promise; the appointment of Chocho to the headquarters. The rest remained empty promises. Unfortunately above that, no sooner had the CPG, the GNLF (Greek National Liberation Front) and DAG taken control of the forces, than its leadership began to use all kinds of excuses to put down the MNLF. The MNLF was a powerful symbol and a separate organization representing the Macedonian people, seen as a threat to Greece. Slowly but surely in time the MNLF was stripped of everything, of its leadership, of its decision making powers and of its voice. The only thing it seems the MNLF was good for was to mobilize the Macedonian people to swell the fighting ranks of DAG.

Eager to join forces with the Democratic Greeks, many Macedonians had forgotten how they were treated in the past but those feelings quickly returned when they discovered that they were being lied to again. As the mistrust began to grow many Macedonians viewed the new “unification” with their Greek partners as absurd and eventually leading to the destruction of the MNLF.

When Zahariadis was asked about “the rights of the Macedonian people” he borrowed a phrase from 1929 from Venizelos who when asked the same question by a representative of the League of Nations, replied: “Greece will abide by the rules of minorities”. Eighty years later Macedonians living inside Greece are still waiting for Greece to abide by the rules for minorities. Nevertheless and in spite of many Macedonians finding this new partnership unpalatable, some Macedonians continued to support the joint struggle even though the power to control their own destiny was slowly being diminished.

Ironically and despite Zahariadis’s vain efforts to bring understanding between the right and left in Greece by peaceful means, this new unification of forces was making military headways which could not go unnoticed, not only by Greece but by the whole world as the fighting in Pajak Mountain escalated in November 1946.

Soon after the DAG headquarters was established on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1946, new DAG units were formed and began to conduct campaigns in the

mountains. One of the more memorable early battles took place on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1946 in the villages N'te, Oshani, and Ljuminitza (Shkra) in the north-eastern Meglen Region. Here DAG forces attacked the government units stationed in those villages delivering them serious blows, serious enough to have international significance. The attacks were carried out by a large force of DAG fighters who were in direct command of the headquarters of DAG for the Karakamen, Pajak and Kajmakchalan Mountains.

The government press at the time could not help but acknowledge that this was indeed a serious attack with an overwhelming number of casualties on the side of the government forces. The newspaper "Makedonija" from Solun on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1946 among other things wrote: "Yesterday we received new details of the November 17<sup>th</sup> attack on the village N'te, which verify the ferocity displayed by the army of resistance and the duration of the attack which left many dead including 10 of Colonel Karandzhas's leading men."

The same newspaper reported that the situation of the government ground forces was critical and that the air force should be called in to supply them with ammunition and provisions. Another blow to the government forces, as the newspaper explained, was the loss of Captain Silemanis who was killed during a battle near the village Ljuminitza.

According to a report published by the American Agency Associated Press on November 17, 1946 two government units received devastating losses from the resistance forces at the battle of Ljumitsa.

The success of this surprise attack and the devastating defeat of the government forces created an atmosphere of fear throughout the entire right and sent a chill down the spines of government officials in Athens.

Prime Minister Tsaldaris could not believe that he had a Civil War on his hands and instead of facing up to the reality of the situation he started accusing his northern neighbours – Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania of "meddling in the internal affairs of Greece". He further accused Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania of helping the Partisans and demanded that an international inquiry commission investigate the situation.

Tsaldaris's call for an investigation was opposed by Great Britain, Greece's patron, which became obvious when Yoannis Sofianopoulos, the former Greek minister of foreign affairs, in an interview with the French newspaper "Frantirer", on December 3, 1946 said: "Tsaldaris, in order to justify himself, talks about the beastly deeds of the Macedonian separatists, which is more convenient to place blame on our Balkan neighbours than face the facts." Speaking along the same lines the London Times on November 23, 1946 also wrote: "The current Greek government has reported to the ambassadors of Great Britain and the United States of America that outside influences are responsible for these irregularities. These 'external influences' are attempts to separate Greek Macedonia and

to connect it to a single federal Macedonia. This assertion, among other things, has a need for greater examination. This is the only explanation that fits in with what is happening and cannot be far from the truth.”

After analyzing the battles of Skra and Oshini which took place in the Kozhuv and Pajak Mountain vicinities and those of the Mandalevo and Mavrejovo vicinities at the southern part of Pajak Mountain, both Greek and pro-Greek military experts came to the conclusion that this indeed was a prelude to invading Greece from the north. They concluded that with those battles, the Partisan aim was to take control of the roads and isolate the Meglen basin from Solun and Voden and afterwards it could easily be occupied. By securing the Meglen basin, routes from the north could be established, which would solve the supply problems. According to these same experts, the Meglen Region could then be used as a stepping stone for future campaigns in “partitioning Macedonia from the rest of Greece”.

Was there really a conspiracy by the “northern neighbours” to invade Greece or was this a smoke screen to hide the atrocities being committed by the Greeks against the Macedonian people? The Greek government at the time was well aware of its own vulnerability and knew for certain it would lose the war if it had to fight on its own. So as usual it needed to involve another of its patrons to save its hide. So naturally the Greek government, in order to be given further aid, had to cry wolf. At the same time it did not want to admit to having internal problems of such magnitude and that it was incapable of handling its internal problems on its own. So crying wolf was a good alternative as opposed to admitting to the truth. Such an invasion would surely breach many agreements and would involve the Great Powers. Greece’s problem would be internationalized and it would become someone else’s problem.

The successful campaigns DAG conducted in Kozhuv and Pajak Mountains were not only a wake-up call for the west but they provoked a serious uneasiness in the USA as evidenced by the various contacts made between Burns, the USA Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Diamandopoulos, the Greek Ambassador in Washington DC.

The British too became involved when 30 of their conservative MP’s demanded that their government send an inquiry commission and peace keeping soldiers from neutral countries to secure Greece’s northern border as was done in 1925 by the League of Nations.

The French telegraph agency, on November 26, 1946, sent a telegraph from Washington DC informing that the US government too was looking at the possibility of sending its own troops to Greece, to join a British squadron of sailors which was headed for the Solun Gulf. The government of Prime Minister Tsaldaris, under pressure from the opposition, which was criticizing it for its inability to control its the internal security, also made contact with the Security Council with an appeal for help to stop

Greece's northern neighbours, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania, from attacking Greece.

In retrospect there was no real threat against Greece from the north as both the USA and Britain were well aware of the agreement signed by Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin that Greece was to remain under "British influence" and that there would be no foreseeable help coming from the Soviet Union. So why the conspiracy of an "outside attack"? Further, why blame only the Macedonians for this and not all the democratic forces, most of which were Greeks from the south and from Asia Minor colonists who were dissatisfied with the way various former Greek governments had handled their affairs? Was the Greek government really afraid of its northern neighbours or was it planning something more sinister? Was the call for an external inquiry commission a stall tactic to give the Greek government more time to boost its military capabilities and at the same time internationalize its problem so that the USA too would become involved? We can only speculate.

After gaining Greece back under their influence, the British had one big problem, "how to get rid of the communists". The Greek Royalists and Republicans on the other hand had two big problems; (1) "how to get rid of the communist menaces" and (2) "how to deal with the Macedonian problem".

The British were well aware that sooner or later if the people were allowed to vote in free elections, the vast majority would vote for the CPG and the communists would come to power in Greece. The British were also well aware that their agreement with Stalin was that whoever wins at the polls will govern Greece.

The Greeks on all sides on the other hand were well aware of the Atlantic Charter which expressed the post-World War II aims of the United States and Great Britain. President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain adopted the declaration in August 1941 during a conference aboard a ship off the coast of the Canadian province of Newfoundland and decided among other things that all people who participated in the liberation of the world from Fascism and Nazism would have the right to choose the form of government under which they would live; and to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who had been forcibly deprived of them.

Naturally the Greek aim, regardless of which system or what kind of government was in power, has always been to deny the Macedonians their rights by simply claiming that Macedonians do not exist. But how could they do that when a sizable Macedonian armed force existed inside Greece? They couldn't of course so they had to find another means of dealing with it.

It is my belief that neither Britain nor the United States had any problem specifically with the Macedonian people. Their concern was to keep Greece under western influence and out of communist hands but in order to placate Greece both powers looked the other way and allowed Greece to commit genocide against the Macedonian people. This may be a hard pill for Greece to swallow but was it not Markos Vafiadis, a General of the DAG and a loyal Greek from Asia Minor who during his trial in Athens when referring to “the Macedonian problem” said: “We [meaning the Democrats] accomplished in two short years what many Greek governments were unable to do in decades”? Why did Vafiadis volunteer this information? Was it because despite their otherwise numerous promises to the Macedonian people, the aim of the top CPG leadership was to deprive the Macedonians not only of their human rights but also of their rights to exist as people? We are well aware of how the Greek Royalists and Republicans felt about the Macedonians but what about the Democrats? How did they feel? After Vafiadis’s remarks we should have no more doubts about the “feelings” of Democrats as well! The Greeks, no matter which side, have always been against the Macedonians. It has always been their aim to deny the Macedonians their right of existence.

One more question that comes to mind: “If the CPG-DAG leadership was unwilling to accept the idea of joining forces with the MNLF and with the Macedonians in 1946 why then did they accept it in October 1948? Why were the CPG and DAG willing to induct so many young Macedonians into their fighting ranks unless they had a sinister future plan for them, a plan to perhaps destroy them?”

## **Inquiry Commission Comes to Greece**

After crying wolf to the world in an attempt to pin its internal problems on its northern neighbours, Greece, with the assistance of its patrons in Washington and London, tried to turn the situation to its advantage by involving an International Inquiry Commission. The request for an investigation to the United Nations Security Council was made by the Tsaldaris government which claimed it had physical evidence to prove that its neighbours were the cause of its internal problems and of its current crisis. Armed with Serbian military uniforms, buttons and other items which Serbian detachments left behind in 1915 as well as statements taken from prisoners sentenced to death, the Greek government was prepared to prove that “it did not have a civil war in its hands but rather the problems it was experiencing were of an external nature.” In other words the reasons for the internal conflict, Greece alleged, could be found outside of Greece and the crisis inside Greece was actually created by Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania. Tsaldaris went a step further and declared to the whole world that “Greece was a paradise on earth”. He quoted two Pomaks who had fled Bulgaria because, as they put it, it was “hell on earth” to live in but who found freedom and great satisfaction by living in Greece. He then arranged for the Pomacs to go to New York and speak to the Americans about their freedom and the good life they found in Greece.

The USA and Britain also saw the Greek crisis as an opportunity to justify their military presence there. Even though Greece had been traditionally a British ally the USA saw the crisis as an opportunity to extend its own sphere of influence.

The American plan for intervention in Greece under the Truman administration became public knowledge when on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1946 the newspaper “Daily News” published a story which among other things disclosed that “With a strong sea presence in the Mediterranean, the Americans are hoping for a lasting stay to secure the British vital lanes to the far east, until those lanes are out of danger from Russia... There is also a danger that a ‘Spanish type of War’ may break out in Greece at any time which will require the United States to intervene in the same way the Germans, Italians and Russians intervened in Spain.” (“Daily News”, November 29, 1946)

Osten, the American representative of the Security Council, was a bit more critical when he later revealed that if his country was going to intervene, it would intervene with force.

After a long and vigorous debate, the Security Council decided to support the formation of a Special Inquiry Commission which was to be sent to Greece with the understanding that its mission would NOT be to investigate “reasons why a civil war was taking place in Greece” as the Soviet delegation had recommended but to investigate “Yugoslavian,

Bulgarian and Albanian involvement in Greece” as was recommended under the insistence of the delegates from the Western Block countries.

A Special Inquiry Commission was put together in early February 1947 with delegates from various countries in the world and observers from Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece and Albania, the four states under investigation. Although the Commission arrived in Athens the headquarters from which it was expected to work until the investigation was completed was established in Solun. After completing its investigation the Commission was required to go to Geneva where it was expected to deliver its findings which later were to be delivered to the Security Council and brought before the General Assembly of the UN.

The same day the Commission arrived in Athens it faced its first protest from one of the democratic Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF) organizations carrying a huge well lit sign bearing the inscription “English Leave Greece!” Later on the same day another incident occurred which should have clued the Commission in as to what was really was going on in Greece. This particular incident was an attack on a central prison in Sparta by the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) resulting in the escape of 300 political prisoners. Was this not enough evidence to clue in the Commission that these incidents couldn’t have possibly been a result of “external meddling” as the Greek government was so boldly claiming?

To expedite its investigation the Commission was divided into four teams each investigating various incidents that had occurred in particular sectors of Greek occupied Macedonia. But given that the Commission’s mandate was to only investigate “external involvements” in Greece and given that most of its members were pro-American why would one expect its findings to be fair and impartial? In other words, perhaps unbeknownst to most of the Commission’s members, the entire investigation was staged to justify American and British military involvements in Greece. It was never the Commission’s mandate to uncover the truth of what was really was going on inside Greece, even from the outset. In fact Greece did not admit to “having” a civil war until the 1970’s.

Before the Commission’s arrival at designated places in Greek occupied Macedonia, the Royalist army, police and gendarmes were dispatched to stage the area and produce evidence and witnesses coached to tell the Commission’s delegates what the Greeks wanted them to know. Stories were obviously fabricated and lies concocted for witnesses to tell and testify to the effect that Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania were behind all this. Looking at this another way, which by the way only people that have lived in Greece can understand, what soul would have had the courage to come forth and tell the truth and expect to live after the Commission was gone? The oppressed people living in Greece, particularly the Macedonians, have had too many tragic examples to draw on and to have faith to trust strangers with the truth, a truth which would

surely end their life. Macedonians have been betrayed too many times, especially by strangers who pretended to have their best interests at heart. Given their tragic past experiences not all Macedonians could afford to expose themselves to misfortunes just for the mere truth. But not all Macedonians were like that. There were also those brave but foolish Macedonians who in fact did step forward and told their stories only to end up dead. Among the brave witnesses who stepped forward and paid with their lives were Mahavis, Panakilis, Tsereos, Mihailidis, and many others. Unfortunately their suffering did not end with their death. Greeks were not above mistreating their families, stigmatizing them for life and for generations to come so that their descendents would never prosper in Greece. Then when someone from those families crossed the Greek border, they were banished from their homeland and never allowed to return. This by the way continues in Greece to this day. People born in the free world who take their freedom for granted do not understand or believe that such behavior can be possible in a so-called “civilized” democratic country like Greece, let alone believe the fantastic stories the Macedonians have told about their experiences in Greece during that dreadful civil war.

Another brave group of Macedonians to step up to the plate and voice their displeasure with the Greek regime, particularly with staging false scenes and concocting lies about the Macedonian National Liberation Front (MNLF), were 161 Macedonians from Lerin Region who at the time were jailed in the Pavlos Melas prison in Solun. They were particularly disgusted with the way Valtadoros, a paid government witness and professional liar was paraded in front of the Commission slandering the MNLF.

The prisoners made their protest through a letter smuggled from the prison and handed to the Commission. Among other things the letter said “We are repulsed and deeply offended by Valtadoros and the government’s slandering lies about the MNLF calling it an autonomous organization. Worse than that is Valtadoros’s allegations that Macedonians are traitors when he and those in the Greek government know very well that the Macedonians fought to rid the Fascists and Nazis and liberate Greece. They very well know that we Macedonians together with the Greek people fought in the front lines in Albania to defend the integrity and independence of Greece because we believed in one free and democratic Greece in which we all would be equals.”

“During the tri-occupation” the letter continues, “we fought in the ranks of the GNLF – NLAG (National Liberation Army of Greece) to free Greece from the three occupiers. Unmercifully we attacked the invaders and we liquidated them, and today we are fighting together with the Greek people for freedom, democracy, for the independence of Greece and for our equal rights in this Greek state...” At the end of the letter the 161

prisoners made an appeal to the commission to visit them at the Pavlos Melas concentration camp and find the truth for themselves. They invited the Commission to question the Greek government and explain to its delegates why Macedonians were in jail after they fought and sacrificed their lives to free Greece. They also appealed to the Commission not to listen to the lies and made up stories of this government's sponsored professional false witnesses. ("Zora", April 15, 1947)

During the Commission's stay in Solun, the MNLF sent letters and documents through its regional committees providing detailed evidence of the terror that was conducted in Greece against the democratic population. The MNLF Voden Region regional council took a step even further by publishing a ten page open letter in the February edition of its newsletter "Pobeda". The ten page open letter was addressed to the Commission and contained all kinds of documentation including names of people killed, jailed, interned, etc. It also included detailed information about the terrorist acts and atrocities committed by the Greek government supported armed bands, police, army, collaborators, etc., against the Macedonian people.

What kind of an effect these protests and letters had on the Commission we don't know but we do know that when the Maximos government took over from Tsaldaris it did everything in its power to create a kind of façade to confuse the Commission. To keep the Commission away from the prisoners, the government, in the name of prison reforms, released a large number of prisoners. Some of the internment camps were also moved to avoid being found by the Commission.

The British too became involved in the conspiracy when the British Vice consul in Lerin began to organize an autonomous movement and to send agents into Yugoslavia.

Not all claims and allegation the Greek government with its false witnesses brought before the Commission however went unchallenged. Following is a conversation that transpired between colonel Kerenezi, the Albanian representative, and Valtadoros, the Greek government witness, as was registered in the protocol of the Commission's 36<sup>th</sup> sitting;

KERENEZI: Were you the only prisoner or were there others that were sued at the same time as you?

VALTADOROS: There were four other people that went before the court with me. KERENEZI: What was the outcome of the court?

VALTADOROS: They were all sentenced to death.

KERENEZI: Where are the other four that were sentenced to death?

VALTADOROS: They were all killed.

KERENEZI: Can you please tell us why the other four, your comrades, were killed and why you are still alive?

VALTADOROS: I can't tell you why, but I believe I am still alive so that I can come here and be a witness to the guilt of our neighbours...

Given the above conversation, the Commission should have further pressed the issue as to why Valtadoros was allowed to live and how he alone managed to escape the clutches of his captors while his comrades were killed after being sentenced to death. Unfortunately the Commission was not interested in finding the truth but only to record what the witnesses had to say.

Another example of the way the Commission handled its obligations was the way it handled the General Markos Vafiadis interview. Even though the Commission had made arrangements to meet with Vafiadis, the Belgian delegate whose team was expected to do just that was systematically avoiding Vafiadis. The Belgian delegate's excuse was that he needed a government armed escort to accompany his team in the terrain. He knew full well that Vafiadis would not risk making contact if there was a chance of him being captured.

Failing to make contact through the Belgian delegate, the Soviet and Polish delegates along with the representatives from Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania then decided to pursue the matter on their own and visited Vafiadis in the mountains without the aid of armed guards.

Vafiadis informed the Commission's delegates not only of the current conditions in Greece but also gave reasons for them. Besides describing the general situation in Greece, Vafiadis it seems by telling the truth about the MNLF gave his support to the Macedonian cause referring to the Macedonians as a self declared Macedonian minority living in the Greek part of Macedonia. He also defended the MNLF's program calling it identical to that of the GNLF, adding that Greeks and Macedonians have bled together to achieve their aims but the Macedonians bled more and experienced worse conditions than the Greeks. (Oskar Davicho, "Sa Markosovim Partizanima", page 96)

After spending two months in Greece, the Greek government requested that the Commission also interview witnesses in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. The Greek government alleged that there was an organized MNLF network of Partisans in Skopje and Bitola which conducted campaigns against Greece. The Greek government also produced a number of witnesses who it claimed would testify to that effect. Among the witnesses identified were Papatukas, Mensurakis, and Bopchis. Naturally these testimonies were intended to confuse the Commission. Yes Macedonian ex-Partisans did exist in Yugoslavia and perhaps they were organized in some ways but what the Greek witnesses failed to disclose to the Commission was that these Macedonians were Greek citizens, refugees who had fled Greek occupied Macedonia because of Greek oppression.

Unfortunately not all members of the Commission were interested in getting to the truth.

In the protocol of the 57<sup>th</sup> sitting, on page 12, Orutia, the Columbian delegate, made a statement regarding one of the Greek witnesses which reads “There is no use listening to Bopchis because in the beginning of his testimony he told us one thing and later he told us something else. Some delegates believe his testimony is full of lies and inaccuracies, and as far as they are concerned, it’s worthless.” (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Misl, 1971, page 210). Unfortunately the report the Commission handed to Geneva did not exactly reflect what was witnessed and observed in Greece. Besides reporting the unsubstantiated allegations collected from the witnesses as facts, the Commission failed to report on the atrocities committed by the Royalist and Republican regimes against the democratic people of Greece, particularly against the Macedonians. Instead of focusing on the real internal issues which were the primary cause of the crisis in Greece, the Commission went on a witch hunt looking for guilt in Greece’s northern neighbours Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania. One thing however the Commission could not keep silent on was the terror with which the Greek regime used to persecute its minorities.

The Commission’s special report was submitted to the United Nations on July 1947 and was discussed during the July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1947 Security Council sitting. Here Andrej Gromiko, the Soviet delegate, harshly criticized the report and accused the Greek government and its patrons Great Britain and the United States of concocting incidents at Greece’s northern border in order to internationalize an internal issue. He went on to say that the crisis in Greece was caused by internal problems mainly by the government’s use of oppressive measures against its democratic citizens who were left with no other choice but to rebel. Although it was not spelled out but certainly was implied; the reason for the crisis being most intense at Greece’s northern borders, Gromiko explained, is because the Greek government used extreme force against its northern-most citizens who experienced the full brunt of this Greek terror and oppression.

After debating the issue the Council proposed a number of resolutions which among other things called for;

1. The Greek government to take appropriate measures to stop all incidents at the Yugoslav, Bulgarian and Albanian border;
2. Normal diplomatic relations between Greece on one side, and Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania on the other, to be reinstated;
3. The governments of Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania to solve their refugee problems in the spirit of understanding;
4. The Greek government to undertake measures to rid itself of all discrimination against its ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian citizens

who live inside the borders of Greece and to provide them with basic human rights allowing them to speak their mother tongue, and enjoy their culture.

One other resolution the Security Council proposed was the evacuation of foreign armies from Greece but this resolution was defeated in favour of the British-American recommendation calling for a permanent Balkan Commission to document border incidents. Even though the Greek armed forces had not documented even a single border incident, the British and Americans insisted that Greece's internal problems were caused externally.

The way voting was conducted at the UN indicates that the British and Americans had greater influence in getting what they wanted instead of getting at the truth. But even though the Security Council took the American side on the resolutions, it did not mean that the delegates, even the pro-USA ones, were convinced that the reasons for the Greek Civil War could be found outside of Greece's borders. The Norwegian delegate, for example, stated that in his opinion the testimonies acquired by the Commission did not have sufficient evidence to prove that the governments of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania were directly involved in helping the Greek Partisans or that they broke any UN rules. Delbos, the French delegate, also expressed his opinion by stating that "I cannot say with certainty that the Yugoslav, Bulgarian and Albanian governments provided any help to the Greek partisans. In my opinion there is no sufficient evidence to prove that. Speculation is not proof. Therefore I believe the reasons for the internal strife in Greece can be found inside Greece..." Even Spak, the pro-USA Belgian delegate, expressed concern when he stated that "I cannot say that it can be attested that Greece's northern neighbours are in support of the Greek Civil War..." (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Misl, 1971, pages 211 and 212)

Perhaps if the United Nations played less politics and paid more attention to the realities on the ground many more problems could have been solved and many conflicts prevented. Even though, for the wrong reasons, the UN had a chance to solve the problems in Greece and prevent the escalation of the Greek Civil War and all the tragedies that followed. Unfortunately the UN, as usual, is more concerned with placating its powerful members than dispensing justice. Resolution 4 above recommended basic human rights for the minorities in Greece which have yet to be implemented. If the UN did its job and followed up on its recommendations we would not have so many problems today.

## The Spring Offensive

Unable to continue financing the ailing Royalist and Republican regime in Greece, the British Labour government decided in early March 1947 to withdraw its support leaving Greece's fate in the hands of the United States, which under no circumstances was prepared to let Greece slip away from its grasp. Without external intervention the Royalist and Republican regimes would have lost Greece to the Democratic forces and Greece would have taken its place among the family of Balkan Peoples' Republics, at least in theory.

The American government's decision to support Greece was made public on March 12, 1947 when US President Truman in his speech to the US Congress introduced what came to be known in diplomatic circles as the "Truman Doctrine". Soon afterwards the US government approved a 350 million dollar military assistance package to prop up the ailing Royalist and Republican regime in Greece. This however was contrary to what the United Nations had recommended when it requested that all foreign powers leave Greece. Ignoring the UN's recommendation the US government reaffirmed its position by stating that it respects the UN decision and if the majority of the General Assembly or Security Council decides it wants a change in politics, the US will abide by its decision. However at this point, just after World War II, many UN members were heavily dependent on economic aid from the US and were not willing to take a stand against the US government's decision.

The US government, having studied the situation in Greece, was well aware of the shortcomings of the current regime and its inability to win without external intervention.

Truman's intervention plans, prepared by American experts familiar with the situation in Greece, proposed that the US provide Greece with an economic and military aid package to equip an army of 200,000 soldiers as well as pay for American agents and advisors to assist the Greeks with military preparations and training. It was also rumoured that the US loaned Greece American military officers to lead the Greek Civil War.

While stationed in Athens, Tomas Reynolds in a telegram sent to New York on December 15, 1947 wrote: "The American experiment in Greece called for much more intervention than has been in other countries in Europe. The US aim here is to prevent by any means possible the falling of Greece into the Russian orbit which would then open a Mediterranean port for the Soviet Union".

If the obvious can be stated here, it never was the intention of the USA to help the Greek people as was stated by President Truman in his address to the US Congress on March 12, 1947 but rather to carry out the age old Western quest to keep Russia out of Mediterranean waters. In other words the American intervention in Greece was about extending the old British

politics of blocking the Soviet Union from widening its influence in the oil rich Middle East which the USA wanted for itself.

With the economic and military boost received from the Americans, the Greek government in April 1947 began preparations for a spring offensive aimed against the Democratic forces and the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG).

With American guidance a strategy for the spring offensive was prepared. The strategy called for forcefully evacuating villages and destroying properties in order to (a) deprive DAG of new recruits, (b) deprive DAG of its sources of food; the villages being the main providers of DAG's food and (c) cut off DAG's information networks which were mainly carried out by people from the villages.

The majority of villages evacuated were those located in secluded areas in Greek occupied Macedonia where most of DAG's bases were located. The evacuated villagers were relocated in cities or larger villages which at the time were under the control of Royalist and Republican police and military forces.

The orders to evacuate the villages came directly from Napoleon Zervas, the Greek Minister of Internal Affairs, and were subsequently carried out by the Royalist and Republican police and military forces.

The evacuations naturally created serious problems not only for DAG, which lost its supply of food, new recruits and communication lines but also for the people evacuated. Before the evacuation villagers in remote areas enjoyed a relatively peaceful life away from the brutalities and terror that other citizens had to endure but now that they were evacuated they too came to live under the same harsh conditions. If there was any spirit left in them, in time and under those conditions, it was sure to be destroyed. They too now would begin to understand the brand of terror, killings and abuse the democratic population had to endure every day of its life. The Royalists and Republicans were counting on it. "Beatings, people being jailed and mistreated, killings, etc, are everyday occurrences in Greece which have nothing to do with the Partisans. They break the heads of women and everywhere they sow waste and fear and take kinds of measures which force the majority of people to flee to the Mountains." (June 5, 1947, *La verité sur la Grece*, "Livre bleu" p. 38)

While the United Nations Inquiry Commission was still there, police agents in Solun in the middle of the day detained and killed Yanis Zevgos, high ranking member of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) and a representative of the Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF) at the Inquiry Commission. There were rumours that orders to murder Zevgos came from as high up as Zervas himself. (This information comes from a letter written by one of the participants in the assassination by the name of Sidiropoulos. The letter can be found in "Livre bleu" page 32.)

During a separate incident two more people, leaders of the Macedonian National Liberation Front (MNLF) were also killed. Identified by informants, Todor Dojchinov – Morava, MNLF Regional secretary of Enidzhe-Vardar and Pavle, MNLF Regional commander were both killed in the village Krushari, Enidzhe-Vardar Region. (For more details on Morava’s execution see the document “Future”, August 1950 entitled “The Death of Captain Morava”. Also see the newspaper “Voice of the Aegeans”, April 1953, Documents of the leadership of NOF [MNLF] for Enidzhe-Vardar Region).

The following table, submitted to the first world MNLF conference in May 1947 provides some detail of the terror and genocide conducted against the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia to the end of April 1947:

Sacrifices	(Region)				Total
	Kostur	Lerin	Voden	Gumendzhe	
1. Killed	56	90	74	48	268
2. Raped	42	96	150	9	297
3. Locked up	596	3083	2057	814	6550
4. Sued	320	1507	1952	436	4215
5. Sentenced	285	1214	1305	436	3240
6. Interned	122	509	552	115	1298
7. Mistreated	1396	10280	1085	1082	13816
8. Gone Mad from beatings	5	5	2	1	13
9. Houses Burned	110	no data	813	968	1891

(NOTE: The table above is by no means complete; it not only lacks information on Negush Region but has no information on other parts of Greek occupied Macedonia east of the Vardar River. Similarly there is no data for loss of property such as confiscation of herds of sheep, goats and large animals as well as the destruction of 45 villages and on its residents that were taken away by force).

After terrorizing the population into submission making sure no one dared help the Partisans, let alone join them, the Greek government on April 9, 1947 began the spring offensive against DAG. DAG at the time numbered no more than 25,000 fighters armed with light weapons. The idea of the offensive was to push the Partisans north against Greece’s northern borders and either destroy them or force them out of the country as asylum seekers. Here again I would like to point out that Greece once again proved that that there was no “threat from the north” because if there was such a threat Greece would not have pushed the Partisans northward

where they could easily enter the northern countries, re-organize and return to fight. If that were the case Greece could never have defeated the Democratic forces. In fact I believe another “benefit” that Greece received from the United Nations Commission’s visit is assurances that Greece’s northern neighbours would not allow armed DAG fighters to enter their territory.

Having somewhat understood the motives of the spring offensive, in February 1947, the leadership of DAG ordered its battalions to leave their bases in Pajak –Kajmakchalan, Karakamen and Vicho Mountains and head south to Thessaly and southern Greece. The aim here was to amass a large Partisan force in southern Greece and lead the fighting there.

Unfortunately the timing of this move and the way it was conducted angered the MNLF leadership. First the Macedonians were not properly informed about this move. Second, the move happened to take place just after all democratic forces, Greek and Macedonian, were consolidated under DAG. Third, the moment the battalions arrived in Thessaly the Macedonian leadership was relieved of command and replaced with Greeks. Having their leaders replaced naturally created bitterness in the Macedonian fighters and to make matters worse those who displayed their displeasure in public were singled out and executed outright. Among those who died this way was Gjorgij Milev from the village Tsakoni, Meglen Region. After witnessing the deaths of their compatriots, some Macedonian fighters could not bear to be part of DAG and decided to desert. Among those who deserted was Major Adramanov from the village Patele. Adramanov deserted in Thessaly in April 1947 and surrendered to the regular units.

As soon as DAG units started arriving in the mountains of Thessaly, government forces began to implement “cleanup operations” in an attempt to surround the Partisans. But, being better at fighting in rough mountainous terrain, DAG units kept slipping away through enemy defenses, moving behind enemy lines, cutting off enemy retreat and communication lines and scoring victories against the enemy.

On April 22, 1947 the Greek government with 12,000 infantry soldiers, artillery and aviation launched the first phase of a major offensive against the Partisan force of no more than 3,500 fighters. The campaign was conducted in the mountainous terrain and covered a radius of about 300 km. However, DAG by now had become familiar with the terrain and had established good communication lines with the surrounding villages and, being aware of the government’s objectives, was prepared for the offensive. Also DAG, consisting of lightly armed and smaller units, had the freedom of maneuverability to escape concentrated enemy attacks. The bad weather at varying heights of the mountainous terrain also had a negative impact on the success of the offensive by keeping the government air-force grounded.

All in all the spring offensive was not as successful as anticipated and according to a government announcement on April 25, 1947 DAG's losses numbered 651 dead, 84 captured, 414 deserted and 117 surrendered. On the government side, 31 were killed and 80 were wounded and captured. According to a DAG announcement however, on the side of DAG 130 were killed, 42 were wounded and 39 deserted. On the government side 219 were killed, 294 were wounded, 19 deserted and 130 were incapacitated due to frostbite. (Andonovski, Hristo. *Vistinata za Egejska Makedonija*. Skopje: Misl, 1971, page 221.)

The second phase of the spring offensive was launched on May 11, 1947 and was conducted by a horizontal frontal attack stretching about 250 km from Mechovo on the west side to Elasona in the east and involved 30 battalions. The government's aim during this phase was to no longer surround and destroy DAG but to comb the terrain and push the Partisans north. During this phase the government's objectives were to secure space and establish new bases to the north and as the campaign moved north to use the bases as stepping stones for the third phase of the operation which would strip the Partisans of their essential strategic points, food supplies and reservoir of new recruits. Another of the government's objectives was to break DAG's connections between its headquarters in Thessaly and those in Western Greek occupied Macedonia.

By May 19, 1947 the government had fully deployed its forces and by mid-June 1947 it widened its reach to Mount Olympus.

After a month of deploying phase two of the operation, the Partisans were pushed away from this terrain into new regions but not northward into the lands of Greece's northern neighbours as was expected.

A review of this phase of the "spring offensive" revealed that the undertaking on the government side was not as easy as expected. Similarly DAG too suffered many losses having to maneuver its fighters in unfamiliar terrains. In one particular instance an entire DAG detachment, under the command of Kartsionis, was decimated by government forces when it lost its way out of the Hjala massif while attempting to flee to Mount Kozijak. Many DAG fighters also suffered from frostbite because they were unprepared for the mountainous cold climate where they took shelter in the nights. Even more DAG fighters lost their lives during the attack on Grevena in the third phase of the spring offensive. And as D. Vlandas, former CPG member, former Minister of Farming in the former Democratic government put it; it was all General Markos Vafiadis's fault. Vlandas blamed General Vafiadis for ordering DAG units to occupy the Hasija and Antihasijski Massifs in the beginning of 1947, which by the way were located outside of the perimeter of the free territories. Instead of concentrating his defenses in Greek occupied Macedonia and setting an ambush for the Republicans and Royalists as was expected, Vafiadis was accused of using DAG elite units for his own purposes; one being to

provide security for his meeting with the United Nations Inquiry Commission.

Markos was also held directly responsible for the destruction of Kartsionis's detachment since he was the one who ordered it to take the Koziak massif at any cost.

Regardless of whose fault it was DAG's leadership couldn't have possibly known exactly what the enemy was planning but instead of taking action while it could, the Democratic leadership sat static while DAG, from March 31, 1946 up to September 15, 1947 kept registering casualty after casualty, a period during which the civil war in Greece could have been resolved.

During its three and a half years of operation, as documented by "Neos Kosmos", September 1950, pages 601-602, DAG fought 593 battles and skirmishes, killed 4,878 enemy troops, wounded 2,061 and captured 1,329. In terms of material damages DAG destroyed 17 tanks, 6 planes, 1 cannon, 14 locomotives, 11 rail cars, mined 6,248 meters of railway, destroyed 68 bridges and ripped out 1,640 meters of telephone line. DAG also confiscated 38 large 81 mm mine throwers with 1,268 rounds, 57 small mine throwers, 10 machine guns, 342 automatic rifles, 2,741 rifles, 323 semi-automatic rifles, 36 revolvers, 1,757 hand grenades, 44 radio transmitters, 6 telephone sets and 571 horses.

And what does all this mean? Considering the control the Democratic forces exercised over Greece and the support they enjoyed from about 80% of the population, they could have decimated the Royalists and Republicans, rid themselves of the Fascist regime, former oppressors and occupier collaborators and if not as a socialist republic they could have established Greece as a democratic republic with rights for all minorities, just as Yugoslavia did. The best time for doing that would have been the period from March 31, 1946 to September 1947 when DAG exercised considerable power. Provoked by the government forces, this was DAG's best chance for widening the armed movement and even for taking over the government and establishing itself in Greece.

The possibility of this becoming a reality would become obvious if we examine the facts and military potential of each side.

According to Leonidas Stringos, Secretary of the provincial committee of the CPG in Macedonia and Thrace, the enemy (government) had only 5 divisions with 2,000 troops each and only 32 machine guns per division; that is only 10,000 soldiers and a total of 160 machine guns.

The top CPG leadership through all of 1947 procrastinated and refused to deal with the reality it was facing especially when the question "is there is a need to take over the government" surfaced to which Zahariadis replied "Maybe in 1948 but not now. We will not talk about taking over the government". When the top democratic leadership had a chance to recruit up to 60,000 Partisans, it looked the other way and busied itself

with economic and party issues. (The above information was extrapolated from discussions with Markos Vafiadis at the 7<sup>th</sup> CPG plenum, April 1957, “Neos Kosmos” April-May 1957.) Considering that DAG could have had 60,000 Partisans at its disposal when the Greek government had only 10,000 troops, it could have easily won the war with probably a single decisive battle.

According to Stringos, if the CPG wanted to mobilize its forces it could have done so with only a single news release calling on the Democratic forces to re-join the armed struggle. Right before the “spring offensive” the badly needed reserves were ready and willing to be recruited but instead of grabbing them when they were available, Zahariadis decided he did not need more than 2,000 fighters. Was this a decision of an incompetent commander or was this a decision of a conspirator working against the people who had entrusted him to protect them?

What interests us here however, more than what the top leadership of CPG did or did not do to place itself in power in Greece, is what the leadership did not do for the Macedonians and other ethnic groups living in Greece. Even though the CPG made a lot of promises, particularly for granting the Macedonian people equal rights, it fell short on delivering them. Even though Article 4 of the Organization’s policies stated that “All Greeks, men and women are equal and have the same political rights” and that “National minorities have the same citizen and political rights as any other Greek citizens; to protect and promote their national culture, language, religion, education in their mother tongue, etc,” none materialized at the end.

Even though article 5 of the same policy book promised to protect the rights of all people and punish those who had perpetrated acts of terror and who had harmed the innocent would be punished by law, to this day, we are still waiting for that to happen.

Many other promises such as forming a “peoples’ government” in the free territories which would have allowed people to elect their own representatives from local and regional councils to administer education, security and justice, were made, on those too they did not deliver.

Even though it heavily counted on the Macedonians to give it their support, and in spite of how badly Macedonians were repeatedly treated, and even though Macedonians delivered every time, in the end the CPG refused to recognize the Macedonian contribution. Today we have members of the CPG who not only do not recognize the Macedonian contribution to the Greek struggle but insist “Macedonians don’t exist”.

The one short term but positive thing that came out of these policies is the Macedonian peoples’ ability to set up Macedonian language schools in some of the so-called “liberated territories”.

A school to educate teachers in the Macedonian language was opened in the village German in Prespa Region in December 1947. The aim here was to prepare Macedonian language teachers who in turn would teach Macedonian children the Macedonian language. Among the regions that received Macedonian language education at the time were the villages in the free territories of Vicho and Kajmakchalan. Even though this program only lasted several months, 87 Macedonian schools were opened with the participation of over 10,000 students.

## **The struggle in Gramos, Vicho and Malimadi**

More devastating for the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) than the Greek government's spring offensive, was the evacuation of the villages which meant the loss of recruits, food, supplies and communication networks. But in spite of the government's strong effort to eradicate DAG, it survived and thrived, at least in the short term.

The spring offensive should not have been a surprise to the top Democratic leadership since it squandered its opportunities to renew the struggle when defeat of the enemy was possible. The Democrats missed their window of opportunity to attack their enemy while it was weak. With America's involvement and the spring offensive underway the chances of victory for DAG were quickly diminishing.

In Greek occupied Macedonia meanwhile, government forces continued to terrorize the population, particularly targeting those Macedonians evacuated from the villages. Forced away from their homes and lands these Macedonians did not only become refugees, but were left homeless and hungry. Unable to work their lands their local economy was paralyzed and hunger and misery became rampant everywhere. On top of that the Greek government through its propaganda machine, continued to blame the Partisans for their misery.

Faced with an uncertain future and left on their own and defenseless the Macedonian people once again called on the Macedonian National Liberation Front (MNLF) to take matters into its own hands. An MNLF Congress was held on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1948 to assess the situation.

Here is a small example to illustrate how bad the situation for the Macedonians was in Kostur Region between the months of May and December 1947. It was reported that 59 villagers were killed, 107 interned, 365 jailed, 1,650 tortured, 5 had gone mad from beatings, 63 women raped, 3 villages completely emptied of everything, 110 houses burned, 406 barns burned, 28 villages bombed, 412 houses plundered, 1,840 heads of small livestock robbed and 462 heads of large livestock robbed. ("Edinstvo" January 1948).

In other words, Royalist and Republican bands supported by the Greek government and its patrons were operating in Greek occupied Macedonia reeking havoc on the civilian population particularly on those who were blockaded and had nowhere to hide. Their actions unrestricted, these bands were uncontrollably blockading Macedonian villages, killing unarmed civilians and looting and burning homes and barns.

Following is a small number of specific examples of what was done to the Macedonian people during that period;

On January 17, 1948 a government sponsored band from the village Dragomantsi blockaded the village Lukovits and jailed 13 people. Afterwards it executed Petar Dzhopov and Andon Karabatakov, no

explanation was given for the jailing or for the executions. Dimo Srebrenov from the village Tsakoni was tortured in the police station in Sobotsko and went mad after his release. He later died in agony. Ito Tashavcherov and Bozhin Samardzhiev were brutally beaten by government sponsored goons and later died. In the spring on 1948 six people from the village Tsakoni were imprisoned and brutally beaten. Among them was Grigoriadis-Floros, Regional Council of the Agricultural Party (AKE) who was later sentenced to death by the military court in Ber and executed. Any Macedonian captured in battle was sentenced to death and immediately executed. Among those who were sentenced to death and executed included were Lazo Tsakonchev, Gjorgij (Gushi) Tsakonchev, Gjorgij Petsov, Gjorgij Ito Baltakov, Gjorgij Vasilev Baltakov, Mladen Popdimitrov, Gjorgij Dimitriev Hadzhiev and Dimitar Satchiev. Ironically, relatives of these very same people were brutally massacred by a mixed Turkish-Greek band in March 1907 for their involvement in similar activities in the Macedonian people's struggle for liberation.

On February 25, 1947 armed Greek civilians and soldiers attacked and looted the village Lagen, Lerin Region, burned 16 barns, raped a girl and set fire to Evdokija Ivanova's house. The armed band of the notorious Skordas lead by the villains Garapis from Kalinitza and Argir the Vlach from Plasnichevo was responsible for terrorizing the Macedonia population in Enidzhe-Vardar and Gumendzhisko Regions. Armed civilians and gendarmes with whips in their hands roamed the streets calling the Macedonians "Bulgars" and threatening to kill them. These were acts of torment and humiliation never before experienced by the Macedonian population. And if that was not enough the rampant unemployment and economic crisis created by the evacuation of the villages added another dimension of hardship to the people, a burden which forced them to look to the MNLF for relief.

Since the spring of 1947 hundreds of villages were emptied of their residents by force. In Negush Region alone 17 villages were evacuated among them were Gorno Seli, Dolno Seli, Kutsu Fljani, Trasilovo, Golema Reka, Janakovo, Nea Strandzha, Ropan, Arkudohor, Chernevo, Javornitsa, and Tursko Selo.

These treacherous measures undertaken by the enemy could not have been done without having negative effects on the moral of the Macedonian population which naturally turned to the MNLF, the only protector at its disposal it could count on.

In retrospect we can come to one logical conclusion why the MNLF held a Congress and that was to organize a strong defensive movement by mobilizing the people behind it. A problem needed to be solved and the only organization the Macedonians could count on to solve that problem was the MNLF.

The best time for mobilizing all the people for a massive fight would have been in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 1947 but the illustrious top Democratic leadership was at the time procrastinating and missed that window of opportunity. The Greek proletariat in the cities became apathetic, particularly to the Macedonian situation, because somewhere down the line it lost interest in continuing the struggle. Unfortunately those who were interested in renewing the struggle were now rotting in Greek internment camps.

Irrespective of what the Greek winning side thinks of the Greek Civil War, the truth of the matter is the majority of the Macedonian people were not separatists as some would have us believe nor did they have any “irredentist tendencies” but at the same time they were not willing to stand idle to be slaughtered like lambs. Obviously they could not depend on the DAG top leadership to protect them since DAG at the most critical time removed the Macedonian leaders from its ranks and while it was procrastinating, it allowed its enemy to take the lead and overpower it. It was now up to the MNLF to call on the entire Macedonian population, men and women to join the renewed struggle and invest every ounce of strength to save itself.

But needless to say, the MNLF 1<sup>st</sup> Congress did not achieve what it intended to. No sooner than the Congress was over the so called “Democratic Greek” leadership began to infiltrate the Macedonian organization and again began to impose its will on the Macedonian people. During 1948, in addition to mobilizing all the former MNLF cadres and Macedonian fighters into DAG the Democratic leadership also began to mobilize women particularly the wives and relatives of the fighters, many by force. Then after every able body was mobilized and used on the frontlines, the Greeks turned their attention to 14 and 15 year old children, the same children they took out of the country to save from the Greek government bombs. All able bodied children, regardless of age, capable of carrying a rifle, were recruited straight from the child refugee camps in Romania and other places. Through well placed slick propaganda, recruiters appealed to the vanity of these children, convincingly suggesting to them that it was their duty to go back and fight to save their parents. Knowing that they were pitting young and untrained children against a battle hardened professional army, the Democratic leadership knew very well what the outcome would be. So, if they were willing to literally “kill” the next generation of youth, for whom then were they fighting this war? There is no logic to the madness in the Greek Democratic leadership’s thinking except if one considers that perhaps the plan wasn’t to win any war but to actually destroy the people.

The British and Americans were looking for a way to “stamp out” communism in Greece and the Greeks found a way to “destroy” the Macedonians. That is the only conclusion one can reach which actually

makes sense. Why send both husband and wife to the front to be killed and evacuate their children out of the country? There is no doubt that since Varkiza, it was the top Democratic leadership's plan to destroy the very same force it created. The question that remains unanswered however, is why? As for the top Democratic leadership's view of the Macedonians, by now there should be no doubt in anyone's mind that it was never the Democratic leadership's plan to do anything for the Macedonians except to destroy them. It paid lip service when it needed them and then sacrificed them probably to save its own neck.

As it turned out, the 1<sup>st</sup> MNLF Congress, intended to save the Macedonians from the Greek government's treachery did the opposite. With the loss of its leadership through infiltrations, the MNLF did not only lose its independence but allowed the Greek Democrats to use it as a vehicle to do the Communist Party of Greece's (CPG) and DAG's dirty work, recruiting Macedonian fighters and sending them to their slaughter.

The top Democratic leadership's mistrust of the MNLF and the Macedonians openly surfaced on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1948 during the MNLF's 1<sup>st</sup> Plenum when President Mohailo Keramidchiev and Secretary Paskal Mitrevski were removed and replaced by Vangel Kojchev as President and Stavre Kochevski as Secretary, two sell outs and well known opponents of the MNLF who were working against giving the Macedonians rights.

By the middle of 1948 the Greek government with American help began to widen its net on DAG and was making preparations to push the war north into Greek occupied Macedonia.

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that the major and final battles between the Democratic forces and the Greek government would be on Macedonian soil in the Mount Gramos and Pind vicinity. There was also no doubt in anyone's mind, except of course in the minds of the fools that blindly followed the top Democratic leadership's wishes, that the Democratic forces were losing the war. Surely they must have been aware of America's involvement in Greece and of America's attitude towards communism?

The Greek government on the other hand not only had access to funds to arm its growing military machine with the latest weapons, but it also had a full proof plan to successfully cut off DAG from its recruits, food supplies and communication lines which it continued to implement as it drove DAG north.

To free its regular army from the burden of having to shackle the cities and towns now over populated with refugees from the evacuated villages, the Greek government began to form local militias. Besides keeping the population under curfew these local defenders were also charged with keeping the Partisans out and creating the necessary terror to keep the population in check and from forming new resistance organizations.

While the Greek government was bolstering its local forces, the Americans were busy building large airports in Solun, Kozheni and Kavala in Greek occupied Macedonia to accommodate heavy bombers.

As the war for control over Greece continued or perhaps it was a war to uproot communism and destroy the Macedonian population (I will leave that for future historians to decide), the Greek government's aim was to attack DAG's main force at the outskirts of Northern Pind and squeeze it against Greece's neighbours to the north.

Being aware of the situation it was headed in, DAG was prepared to undertake counter measures to pin down the government's main force while allowing various DAG units to make preparations for wider hit and run campaigns. By doing so the DAG leadership was hoping to stifle the enemy's main operational force and at a critical time open a counter offensive, liquidate the enemy and liberate the country. Unfortunately, at the eve of the greatest battle of 1948, there were differences of opinion between General Markos Vafiadis, commander of the forces and Nikos Zahariadis General Secretary of the CPG on how to implement such a plan. Differences which could not be easily bridged resulting in General Vafiadis's dismissal. Vafiadis believed that DAG did not have the capacity to fight defensively on a front. According to Vafiadis, DAG was best suited to fight Partisan style warfare. Zahariadis however did not agree calling Vafidis's fighting style outdated. Zahariadis and his supporters believed that DAG should not only behave like a regular army it should be doing the job of a regular army. Perhaps Vafiadis was correct but we will never know for certain but what we do know is that Zahariadis's interference created a dangerous situation for the Democratic fighters and for the resistance as a whole. ("Neos Kosmos", April-May 1957, page 60).

With Vafiadis out of the way, Zahariadis lead 10,000 lightly armed Partisans in a frontal attack against a heavily armed and mechanized force of 100,000 soldiers consisting of 23 brigades, 100 artillery pieces, many tanks and an entire air-force.

In spite of the odds and the Democratic leadership's poor strategy, the DAG Partisans truly fought gallantly in what can only be described as an epic battle that lasted almost three months and inflicted tremendous casualties on the enemy. Among the enemy losses included were 5,125 soldiers dead, 16,000 wounded and 439 taken prisoners. Other losses included 98 surrendering voluntarily, 1,200 deserting, 35 planes downed and 8 tanks and 5 canons destroyed. But in spite of the gallant effort on the Partisan side, the government army, in a short span of only two months still became master of northern Pind. DAG on the other hand was down but not out. Considering the kind of battles it fought it not only surprised everyone, including the Americans, but without too many losses. In fact the battle for Gramos, considering the odds, was a success for DAG but not the expected outcome for its leadership. In other words DAG did not

destroy the Greek army as expected and did not free Greece from the Royalists and Republicans but did inflict a devastating blow on the government. The real success for DAG however was in its ability on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1948, to outmaneuver its enemy and escape to Vicho and Malimadi Mountains.

Relentless in its pursuit, despite its losses, the Greek government on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1948, deployed 4 foot brigades supported by tanks and air bombers and began the offensive on Malimadi. Again DAG delivered another severe blow on its enemy decimating an entire division and sending its remnants in a flight of panic down the Bistritsa River and Kostur. According to later accounts, the governments defeat in Malimadi was attributed to low moral of its soldiers.

Given that both battles took place on Macedonian soil where the majority of DAG fighters were Macedonian and given that the government forces were better trained, better equipped, better armed with tank and air support and not to mention there were 10 soldiers for every 1 Partisan, there could be one explanation for DAG's victories and that was because the Macedonians were superior fighters, following in the long Macedonian tradition and style of fighting. The reason the Democrats lost the war in Greece was not because of "Macedonian treachery" as they put it but because of the treachery and incompetence of its Greek leadership which sold out the Macedonians and nearly destroyed them.

The Macedonians in their effort to survive were totally committed to winning the war because they truly believed they could find freedom and equability among the Greeks, a mistake made one too many times. Had they fought for independence from the Greeks, as the Greeks claim, the Macedonians would have probably succeeded because every man woman and child mobilized was focused and ready to serve the cause be it fighting, collecting food, transporting munitions, carrying for the wounded, etc. In fact thousands of women put their lives in peril in the war fronts stretching from Bela Voda in the north to the Mountains Vicho and Malimadi in the south-east, under barrages of artillery fire and aerial bombardments digging trenches, carrying wounded and delivering food and ammunition all in the name of the cause. For them this was a noble cause which had nothing to do with "politics" and "ideals" and everything to do with freedom, liberty and equality. Above that stood a unique contribution rarely seen in a people where every man, woman and child showed a willingness to sacrifice everything for freedom. Even those who took the Macedonians to their slaughter recognized their bravery and sacrifices in this war. During the CPG's 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Central Committee held on June 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, 1948, a mention was made which among other things stressed that "The Macedonian peoples' contribution in the struggle for freedom and liberation involved everyone, all people in total. With this personal struggle the Macedonian people have built a firm

liberated and free life as equals, with the blood of their sons and daughters they have won and secured their peoples' democratic future..." ("Nepokoren", #12, August 23, 1948).

Ironically, during the same Plenum the Central Committee of the CPG issued orders to mobilize women and girls as fighters in order to bolster DAG's reserves. These women and girls were to be mobilized from the free territories in the Lerin and Kostur Regions where the vast majority of the population was Macedonian.

By now it must have become obvious to everyone that DAG was not going to win the war and that it was not worth to sacrifice everyone. What would be the purpose in that? This war sucked the lives of the men then their wives and then their sons and now it was about to suck the lives out of their daughters. This, and the fact that the CPG lost its authority with the masses which no longer believed in its revolutionary "Avon Guard" approach, literally killed the moral of the Macedonian people along with the spirit of its fighters. And as Petros Rusos put it during the 7<sup>th</sup> CPG Plenum, "Zahariadis has thrown the party into a second armed struggle without the support of the masses which indicates that playing politics without the masses is adventures politics indeed." ("Neos Kosmos", April – May 1957, page 91).

After it was discovered that Zahariadis wanted to spill even more Macedonian blood, particularly during the fall of 1948, the Macedonians lost their will to fight and began to desert at every opportunity. Loosing his ability to maintain his reserves at a constant level Zahariadis, during the winter of 1948 ordered the execution of a string of attacks against a number of Macedonian cities and town in order to mobilize new fighters and to prove that he still had a fighting force to be reckoned with. Among the cities and towns he attacked included were Karpenisi, Sobotsko, Voden, Lerin and Negush. But in doing so he only managed to kill more fighters and caused more misery for the people. Still being unsatisfied with the carnage he caused he then ordered his fighters to return to their former basis by now destroyed, regroup and wait for instructions to renew the fighting. But by then there was no longer a reason to fight and more than half of the fighters deserted.

During the CPG Central Committee's 5<sup>th</sup> Plenum, held on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1949, Zahariadis, refusing to face reality and continued to speak of DAG as an invincible force that would defeat the Greek government's regular army, destroy the Republicans and Royalist, take over the government and bring victory to the Democratic people. He threw around slogans like "1949 will be the year of victory" and "Death to Monarcho-Fascism and American-no-cratism". He then called on the Macedonian people from the "free territories" to continue their struggle and sacrifice and in place of promising them "equal rights with the Greeks as a minority" as has been done before, he now promised them "National self-division as

Macedonians” but only when the CPG came to power. He said all this when even the most lay of people knew that DAG was facing an unavoidable defeat. Was this an act of an incompetent commander or an act of a treacherous and deceitful traitor? Let the historians of the future decide.

As was done during the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenum, the Macedonian contribution to the struggle was again complimented at the 5<sup>th</sup> CPG Central Committee Plenum. Among other things it was stressed that the Macedonians in Northern Greece have given their all in the struggle with outstanding heroism and self sacrifice which calls much admiration. There should be absolutely no doubt in anyone’s mind that as a result of their effort and spilling of blood the Macedonian people have earned their full national restitution in the way they themselves would want it.

Coming from Greeks who by now knew the Macedonians would get nothing for the sacrifices, these were noble words indeed but why not make such noble gestures in 1941 when this whole mess began? Such noble words would have been welcomed by the Macedonians in 1941 which would have brought them closer to their centuries old aspiration, to have their own state. This kind of commitment would have certainly attracted the entire Macedonian population and today we would have had a multi-ethnic, multicultural democratic Greece instead of this racist country which abuses its ethnic groups and pretends they don’t exist.

But no Greek utters such noble words without a self serving purpose, a purpose which was revealed by the Bulgarian newspaper “Trud” which accepted and hailed this 5<sup>th</sup> Plenum resolution of Zahariadis to be in line with the Communist Party of Bulgaria’s plan for a united and independent Macedonian state. In other words, Zahariadis did not only go against what the Macedonian people fought for – freedom, rights and equality same as the Greeks- but tried to push the Macedonian people into Bulgaria’s hands. Bulgaria has always supported the theory that “Macedonia was Bulgarian”, and now with such an endorsement there was a greater chance for creating a “united Macedonian State” under a peoples’ Balkan Federation which Bulgaria could later claim as its own.

If that was not enough damage done, Zahariadis then blamed his failures on Yugoslavia by declaring he was all for the creation of a separate Macedonia but then the Yugoslavs sabotaged his plans. A little later Zahariadis and his well lubricated propaganda machine would blame DAG’s entire defeat on the renegade Tito who “attacked DAG from behind its back”.

During the MNLF’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress held in March 1949, now infested with traitors and CPG agents, Zahariadis’s followers wasted no time to again blame their own failures on Yugoslavia which according to their propaganda “conducted unfriendly activities against DAG” implying that

Yugoslavia and Yugoslavia alone was the sole cause for the defeat of the armed movement in Greece.

Naturally Yugoslavia was not only blamed for the Greek failure but also for more sinister reasons. Zahariadis's aims for starting such rumors were to put a wedge between the Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia and those in Greek occupied Macedonia. After detecting that it was loosing control of the Macedonians in Greece, Zahariadis and his cronies invented reasons to discredit Yugoslavia in hopes of downplaying the fact that the Macedonians in the Republic of Macedonia now had their own country. The biggest Greek fear was that the Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia, loosing faith in Zahariadis would now turn to Yugoslavia for help. Yugoslavia after all did solve the Macedonian problem by allowing the creation of a Macedonian state.

To keep the Macedonians from reaching out to Yugoslavia, a separate Macedonian Party was formed during the summer of 1949. The Macedonian Party was named "Communist Organization of Aegean Macedonia" or KOEM using a Greek acronym. This organization was not at all Macedonian but useful enough to divide the Macedonians and bring conflict among them. No sooner than this organization was formed, it began a vitriolic propaganda campaign against Yugoslavia calling it "a haven for traitors of the Macedonian people from Aegean Macedonia naming a few such as Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, Mohailo Keramidchiev and others". (Resolution of KOEM).

While this was going on inside Greece, the United Nations was asked to get involved in order to stop the carnage but the government in Athens, sensing a close victory at hand refused, requesting DAG's complete and unconditional surrender before any talks could take place.

More devastating for the Macedonian people than the government's August 1949 Vicho and Gramos offensive, which inflicted great losses on DAG was the fact that many Macedonians fled Greece believing the Greek propaganda that Tito really stole their victory from them. Beaten at Vicho and Gramos the Partisans were told to head for Albania to regroup but after crossing the border they were then told they could never return. The vast Majority, Macedonians, fighters who fought courageously in the battle fields, did not really understand the state of affairs and emigrated with a bitter feeling that "victory was before them, but Tito's treachery robbed them of it". It took 8 years before the truth was revealed (7<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Central Committee of CPG, 1957). The "famous attack on DAG from the back" was only a hoax, a fabricated lie, perpetrated by Zahariadis and his cronies to place blame elsewhere for DAG's defeat. ("Neos Kosmos" #s 4-5, April 1957, pages 37-118).

## **The Plight of the Macedonian Refugee Children**

It was a dreary spring day on March 25th, 1948 when it all began. It was a day filled with high emotions, tears and heartbreaks for the mothers and children of western Aegean Macedonia. It was the day the Detsa Begaltsi (Refugee Children from the Greek Civil War) left, and for most it was the last time that they would ever see their beloved family and home.

The idea of evacuating the children was proposed by a sympathetic group of young men and women at a Youth Conference in 1947 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. The escalating conflict due to the Greek Civil War posed a threat to the civilian population, which was a concern for the "progressive youth". Although they couldn't do anything for the civilian adults who were needed to support the war effort, there was a way to help the children. They proposed a temporary evacuation whereby the children would be sent out of the country to pursue their education in safety, with the intent of being returned once the conflict ended. Although it was a good idea, the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) saw no immediate need for such a plan and as a result it didn't give it much support. Partisan General Markos Vafiadis however did see merit in the proposal because he believed that the conflict would escalate and concentrate in Western Greek occupied Macedonia. He was, at the time, responsible for the defense of parts of western Macedonia that included the territories of the Lerin Region and parts of Kostur and Voden Regions. In 1947 the Partisans were at their peak strength and, with the exception of the large cities, were in control of all territories in Western Greek occupied Macedonia.

When the Royalist and Republican Greek Government began to use heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, the idea for evacuating the children quickly gained CPG support and the "save the children" program was born. Before the program was put into action it gained approval from the Macedonian National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Women's Antifascist Front and the Red Cross. The host countries, willing to look after the children, were contacted to gain their approval and information campaigns were begun to inform the people about the program. The district and village organizations were also asked to participate and were eventually given the responsibility of organizing and implementing the actual evacuations.

When the authorities in the Greek Government found out about the "save the children" program they initiated their own so-called "pedomazoma" (collect the children) campaign. The Greek army upon capturing Macedonian villages was ordered to evacuate the children, by force if necessary. After being gathered at various camps the children were eventually sent to the Greek Island of Leros. There they were enrolled in schools to study religion and became wards of the Greek Queen, Fredericka.

After the conclusion of the Greek Civil War (1951-52) some children from the “pedomazoma” were returned to their homes in Macedonia. Most, especially those whose parents were killed or fled the country as refugees, became wards of the Greek State and remained in dormitories until adulthood. All the children who remained at Leros were completely Hellenized and were never heard from again.

The Leros camps became active again after 1952, this time with children who had returned from the “save the children” program from Eastern Block countries. As a result of Red Cross intervention some children were allowed to return home. Unfortunately the Greek authorities collected them and sent them to the camps in Leros where they were kept until the fall of 1959 before they were released.

Pressure from the community prompted organizers of the "save the children" program to expedite the evacuation process to stop the "Burandari" (nickname for Greek Government soldiers and policemen) from taking more children.

The evacuations carried out by the Partisans were done strictly on a voluntary basis. It was up to the child's parents or guardians to decide whether the child was to be evacuated or not. No child was ever evacuated by force or without consent, but fear and peer pressure were certainly motivating factors. The evacuation zones were selected based on the severity of the conflict and the degree of danger it posed to the children. Central command organizers decided on the selection criteria and qualifications for which children were to be evacuated. The lists included all children between the ages of two and fourteen as well as all orphans, disabled and special children. Before the evacuation was put into effect, women over the age of eighteen were enlisted from the local population and from the Partisan ranks to be trained to handle young children. Widows of fallen Partisans were also recruited as "surrogate mothers" to accompany and assist the children through the evacuation process and during their stay in the host countries.

The evacuation program began to gain momentum in early March of 1948 starting with the recruitment and training of the special teachers. The actual evacuations were carried out on mass starting on March 25th through to March 30th, 1948 until all the designated villages were evacuated. Most children were transported through Yugoslavia and were sent to Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Some were evacuated through Albania and Bulgaria. As the numbers of the evacuated rose, children were also sent to East Germany and the USSR. It is estimated that about 28,000 children in all were evacuated, most of them from North-Western Greek occupied Macedonia. Although smaller in number some orphans, children of Partisans and children of families who were in trouble with the Greek Government authorities were also evacuated.

When their turn came the children from each village were summoned and escorted by Partisan guides to the closest designated border crossing. For their safety the children traveled under the cover of darkness and away from the main roads. In some cases, due to heavy aerial attacks and falling bombs, some villages evacuated their children in haste without escorts and they became stranded in the snow-covered mountains without shelter.

Mothers prepared luggage, a change of clothing, food and eating utensils before escorting their little ones to the designated meeting places. With eyes tearing, mothers said goodbye to their loved ones before sending them into the hands of destiny. Their cries could be heard for a long time as they disappeared into the distance. It didn't take too long before the emptiness was felt and many mothers could not stop crying, contemplating the fate of their little ones.

The children walked in single file behind their surrogate mothers, holding hands. The older children comforted the young as they moved into seclusion. Under the cover of darkness they silently slipped over the terrain, avoiding roads and open spaces, being constantly reminded by their Partisan guides to keep quiet. They crossed over high mountains and steep slopes ever mindful and vigilant of the flying Greek menace above as they made their way to the borders. The lucky ones spent the nights indoors in designated villages. The others slept outdoors in the open spaces of the frigid mountains questioning the wisdom of their elders and wondering, which was more dangerous the falling bombs or the freezing cold.

During their trek one group came across a dangerously steep slope laden with loose rocks leading directly into the rushing waters of a river. Being too dangerous for the children to cross alone each mother had to make several trips carrying children on their shoulders one at a time. Expediency was in order as the slope was exposed to aerial view. One child was lucky that day as a tragedy was narrowly averted. In her haste to get across one mother tripped over a thorn bush, losing her balance. As she stumbled she managed to take the child off her shoulders and toss her up the slope. Luckily the girl didn't panic and was able to brace herself. The mother then grabbed the child's feet and regained her own balance. It was a frightening experience for everyone in the group.

Another group, frightened by the heavy aerial bombardments, left their village under the cover of darkness at one thirty in the morning. It was cloudy and raining that night, ideal for escaping the bombers but a disaster for the morale of the children. It rained all night and through to the next day as the group hid in the mountains. They couldn't risk lighting a fire and being seen so they stayed wet and cold through the day, enduring nature's punishment. When night came they inched their way through darkness over snow covered; thorn infested terrain to the next village. The children were in shock and hardly felt the bleeding cuts on their feet. Some

had no shoes and their mud soaked socks offered no protection against the sharp rocks and stinging thorns.

As one group made their way towards their destination one of the surrogate mothers couldn't stop crying. The person in charge of the group explained that there was no reason for her to be upset since all of the children were accounted for, fed and looked after. But the mother was still upset and kept crying. When asked what was the problem she explained that she couldn't properly take care of a six-month-old orphan baby that was left in her care. She only had one spare diaper and after washing it she had no means of drying it. The best she could do was to put the diaper against her own chest to dry. It never dried properly and she felt so sorry for the poor child who had to wear a cold, wet diaper out in the freezing cold.

The borders could only be crossed at night so the children had to wait in seclusion until it was dark. To prepare them for the journey the children had to leave the villages and head for the mountains before dawn. As they left they were told to leave their belongings behind, promised that they would be delivered to them later by wagon. As the children made their way past the border crossing, the wagon never materialized and they were left without food, utensils, blankets, or a change of clothing. To this day many believe that the Greek Partisans stole their belongings.

After crossing the Yugoslav border, the children were taken to the village Dupeni and from there to Ljubojno to wait for more arrivals. In the care of their surrogate mothers, the children were placed in designated homes where they spent up to a week sleeping on straw covered floors, fifteen children to a room. Food was in short supply so each child was only given a slice of cornbread for supper before being put to bed, still hungry. After a few days of hunger some children resorted to stealing food from the village homes.

After spending a week in Ljubojno, the children were transported by military trucks to Bitola where they boarded a train for Brailovo. In Brailovo each group was assigned to a home where they slept together with their surrogate mothers in a room lined with hay for bedding. Morale was low and the children constantly cried from the enduring hunger and homesickness. Food was scarce so, to preserve rations, the children were fed one meal every other day. Those who lost their belongings had no bowls or spoons to eat with and resorted to using discarded sardine cans and whatever else they could find. Some found discarded toothpaste tubes and fashioned them into spoons. One surrogate mother found a rusty bucket and after cleaning it, used it as a soup bowl. The warm soup took on a red colour as the rust dissolved and came to the surface. The children were too hungry to waste it so she skimmed the rust off the surface and spooned it into all the children. An old woman seeing this felt so sorry for the bunch that she offered them her portion, preferring to stay hungry

rather than having to watch the children starve. At this point most of the older boys were contemplating escape but their concern for the younger ones kept them from doing so. Some were so hungry they scoured the countryside looking for food, eating kernels of grain and corn and even resorting to killing wildlife to satisfy their hunger. After spending a little over a week in Brailovo, the various groups were transported to the nearest train station where each child was pinned with a name and destination tag and prepared for travel to the various host countries. Separating the children was not an easy task as the young clung to the older children and refused to be separated. Siblings clung to each other with all their might, fighting back with tears and cries. It took a lot of convincing and reassurances before they could be separated.

The first groups to leave were the younger children aged five to ten. Most of them were sent to Bela Trskva in northern Yugoslavia. These children were the most vulnerable and had to be quickly rescued before they died of starvation. In Bela Trskva, after spending some time in quarantine, the children were placed in dormitories with proper facilities and plenty of nutritious food. The rest, after spending a week or so at the train station, were sent to Skopje. Life at the train station was harsh as most children were nearly starving and had no energy to move. Their hunger was so overpowering that the children had no energy to even complain about the tormenting lice. Many spent their time resting in the stable cars nestled in the warmth and comfort of the hay. The cars, left from WW II were used by the Germans to transport horses.

When they arrived in Skopje the children were given milk and food, which seemed like a gift from heaven after starving for so long. Without much delay the train wagons were again divided and a group was sent to Romania while the rest continued on their way to Bulkes. Considering the episodes from the last separation, this time the authorities decided not to inform the children or the surrogate mothers. As a result, some children were visiting friends in neighbouring cars and ended up going to the wrong destination. Many mothers didn't know what had happened and worried endlessly about the fate of the missing children. When they arrived in Bulkes (Vojvodina) the groups were supplied with food donated by the United Nations and the children were bathed and given new clothes. From there they were taken by wagons to a nearby hospital for physical examinations. Bulkes was a town built by the Germans and occupied by the Greek partisans. It was teeming with activities geared towards supporting the war effort. Food was plentiful and the children spent most of their days living in empty schools and warehouses. Besides the Macedonians there were also children from Epirus and Thessaly.

As soon as the children became comfortable they were again on the move. After spending about a month in Bulkes they were again loaded onto train cars, given some food and sent off to various destinations.

Unbeknownst to them they had been separated again and sent to Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

When the group destined for Czechoslovakia arrived, the Czech authorities stripped the children naked from their lice infested clothing, cut their hair and gave them a bath on mass. It was a new experience for the Macedonian children to be bathed naked in front of so many people. The local buildings and baths once belonged to the German soldiers but, since their expulsion, they became a haven for the refugee children. After spending time in quarantine the children were taken to a new camp and assigned quarters and schoolmasters. Here they joined other refugee children who had arrived earlier via a different route. The children were re-grouped into pre-school ages 4 to 6, public school ages 7 to 12 and technical school ages 13 and over. The surrogate mothers were responsible for looking after the younger groups consisting of about twenty children each. Their duties included waking them up in the morning, helping them dress into their uniforms, supervising their morning exercises and making sure everyone ate a good breakfast. In the evening they supervised the children playing until they were put to bed. They also had to make sure shoes were polished and uniforms were cleaned and properly hung for the night. Morning started with exercise and a good breakfast. The Czech teachers were professionals, trained in child psychology, who did their best to educate the children properly. In addition to the regular curriculum, the children were expected to learn various languages including Czech, Greek, Macedonian and Russian.

On occasion mothers and children were sent on work assignments to the farms to assist with gathering fruits, berries and mushrooms. With time mothers and children began to adjust to their new life, with the exception of the usual fighting between Greek and Macedonian children, especially the boys. There was friction between the Greek and Macedonian children, with frequent verbal insults sometimes resulting in fistfights. Eventually the Greek children were moved to a new camp, which put an end to the fighting.

When the group destined for Romania arrived, about one thousand five hundred children were offloaded and sent straight to the baths and their flea-ridden clothes were washed in boiling water. After the bath each child was issued under garments and pajamas and was sent to a nearby compound formerly used by the Germans as a hospital during the war. The children stayed there from April until October 1948. Then on October 25th, 1948 many of the children were relocated to Poland. Most Macedonian children wore homemade woolen clothes that shrank during the hot wash. Fortunately, the good people of Romania donated replacement garments and the children were clothed before leaving for Poland. After spending six months in Romania in a quasi-supervised compound without any schooling, the children became wild and

undisciplined. With one supervisor for the entire train the trip to Poland was a joyride. Some children mischievously climbed through the windows of the railcars to the roof of the moving train and stood upright, pretending to fly. When the train approached a tunnel they lay flat on their stomachs clinging hard to the roof of the rail car. As the billowing smoke from the steam engine enveloped them their faces blackened beyond recognition. When they crossed into Poland the train was taken over by a Polish crew. A supervisor, trained to handle children was assigned to each car to deal with the rowdiness. For the rest of the trip the children were well fed and rewarded with chocolates and apples for good behaviour. When they arrived in Poland at the city of "Londek Zdrui", the children were placed under Greek supervision, grouped by age and assigned to various school dormitories. Children, of unknown age were grouped by size and height. Initially the children refused to cooperate, mistrusting the administrators and fearing separation again. It took Red Cross intervention and much reassurance to convince them to cooperate. Unlike the compound in Romania, the dorms in Poland were well staffed with one director and two or three assistants per dorm. Each dorm had eight to ten rooms with four children per room. There was no shortage of food, toys, or games. The directors were responsible for supervising morning exercises, breakfast and getting the children to school on time. After school they made sure the children came back safely, were given supper and put to bed.

About 2,000 refugee children were sent to Hungary and assigned quarters in a military barracks in Budapest. There each child was undressed, sprayed with pesticide, bathed, dressed in new clothing and given a package of toiletries that included soap and a tube of toothpaste. The children not knowing what the toothpaste was mistook it for food. The aroma of mint reminded them of candy and many wasted the toothpaste, attempting to eat it.

Initially Greek and Macedonian children were mixed together in a single group. But due to fights the authorities were forced to split the children into smaller groups, segregated by village of origin. After spending three weeks in quarantine the groups were adopted by the Hungarian community. Each village community, supported by a factory complex, adopted a group. Some found themselves among the richest communities in the region and were privileged to live in quarters made of marble. Nearby there was a small lake teeming with exotic and colourful fish. Unfortunately the children were all homesick missing their mothers and had little appreciation for luxury. Slowly however routine began to set in as the children attended school and became involved in school and community activities. Besides the regular curriculum the refugee children were expected to learn to read and write in their native language. Even though Greek officials administered the programs and scoffed at the idea,

the Macedonian children were given the choice of learning Macedonian if they wished.

I want to mention here that the Macedonian programs were a direct translation (word for word) from the Greek programs. Even though the children were learning in their native Macedonian language, they were learning what the Greeks wanted them to learn. The Macedonian teachers were not allowed to diverge from the established programs. In other words, Hellenization and Greek propaganda continued to influence the Macedonian children even outside the Greek borders.

By 1949 casualties were mounting at home and reports were filtering through to the refugee camps where children received bad news about the fate of their parents and relatives. Morale was so low that the children became isolated, withdrawn and would not sing, talk, cry, or even eat. To boost their morale the surrogate mothers, who wore black to mourn the deaths of their husbands, resorted to wearing white and colourful dresses. For the sake of the children, in spite of their own sorrow, mothers had to appear cheerful and put on happy faces.

As the Civil War in Greece intensified, the Partisans were running out of recruits at home and began to look at the refugee children abroad as a possible source. Although draftees were recruited from all the camps abroad, most of the fighting force came from Romania. Initially two new groups were formed and brought back for military training. The recruitment campaign and propaganda was so tempting that the youngsters couldn't resist it and were happy to volunteer. Any child strong enough to carry a rifle, regardless of age, was good enough for the draft. The first two groups recruited were instantly massacred upon engaging the battle hardened Greek Army. They were all under the age of fifteen, had no combat experience and no idea of what to expect. The third group left Romania and went to Rudary, Prespa via Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Upon arriving the young soldiers were sent to Shterkovo, another village in Prespa, for about a month of military training and preparation for combat. The young men spent part of March and April 1949 performing military exercises, learning to operate weapons and set explosives. When word came that the first two groups of young fighters were decimated there was a loud outcry by the community against such atrocities, "We did not save our children so you can slaughter them." The third group was only spared because many mothers demonstrated and voiced their anger against such a barbaric draft. The group was demobilized before reaching the battlefields and many of the children were sent back to the refugee camps. Some were allowed to go home only to end up as refugees again during the mass exodus in the fall of 1949.

As the Greek Civil War was coming to a close Western Greek occupied Macedonia was bombed to dust. Partisans and civilians alike fled to Albania to save themselves. When the war was over many wanted to

return but Greece did not want them back. Anyone who voluntarily fled was not allowed to return, regardless of whether they were guilty of any crimes or not. After spending some time in the camps in Albania, the people of Macedonia, again victims of someone else's war, became permanent war refugees and were sent to various Eastern Block countries. Before departure the refugees were separated into two groups. One, made up mostly of Partisan fighters, was sent to the USSR. The other, consisting mostly of civilians and Partisan support staff, was sent to Poland. After the groups were separated they were transported to the port of Durasi, loaded onto cargo ships and sent westward through Gibraltar to Poland and eastward via the Black Sea to the Soviet Union. The voyages were long and unpleasant. To avoid detection the refugees were literally hidden inside the cargo and at critical times ordered to remain immobile and silent for long periods of time. When they landed at their destinations the refugees were stripped and their flea-infested clothes were burned. After being powdered with pesticide and bathed in hot baths they were placed in quarantine where they spent about a month and a half resting idly before being relocated to permanent quarters.

After settling down and securing employment in their new countries, many parents began to look for their refugee children and with the help of the authorities were able to bring them home to their adopted countries. As a result many children left their host countries to join their parents in Poland, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, etc.

Refugees with relatives in Canada, the USA and Australia through sponsorship made attempts to immigrate themselves and look for their children or have their relatives look for their children if immigration was not possible. Initially "the iron curtain" was shut tight and made it difficult to make inquiries but as the Red Cross became involved it became easier. In 1953, during a Red Cross convention in Switzerland, the question of the Refugee Children from the Greek Civil War came up and the various Red Cross agencies agreed to cooperate and exchange information with each other. After that anyone requesting help to locate missing persons in Eastern Block Countries was not refused.

There are instances where Macedonians did experience problems with the Red Cross but these were due to Greek misinformation. When the Red Cross went looking for refugees in the Greek administered refugee camps they were told that the Macedonians were "migrant workers", not refugees. Here is an actual account of what happened to one Macedonian woman in Poland.

The woman was well liked by her colleagues and in time became a model worker and qualified for a month of paid vacation. When her turn came she was sent to a luxurious mountain resort. She was alone and felt uncomfortable going places but did agree to go and see the nativity in a local church. There she met two women who suspected that she was not

Polish and were curious about how she had gotten there. After some discussion it turned out the women were Red Cross workers and interested in finding people like her. When the women found out that she was a refugee interested in returning home, and that many others were in a similar situation, they urged her to seek help. She was given an address in Warsaw where she could meet with Red Cross officials and tell them her story. Upon returning from her vacation she and a friend went to Warsaw. After eleven days of appealing and pleading their story was heard. Officials were curious as to why this hadn't come up at the refugee camps during the official Red Cross visits. As she recalls, unbeknownst to her, the Greek organizers made sure that the Macedonians were sent on day trips on the days of the Red Cross visits. Even after all this the woman was still not allowed to leave. Greece would not accept her without a request from her husband. Her husband at the time was serving a prison sentence in the Greek concentration camps. It was not until 1954, three years later, that he was able to initiate the process for repatriation. The woman arrived home in May 1958 but could not stand the oppressive atmosphere and soon afterwards she and her family immigrated to Canada.

By 1950 Greece was taking extreme measures to close its borders with Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Trusted Albanians from Epirus were brought into Macedonia and seeded throughout the border villages to act as eyes and ears for the Greeks. Greek authorities clamped down on the remaining population and no one was allowed to travel without permission. There were strict rules of conduct put into effect, including curfews. Anyone caught wandering outdoors past dusk was shot on sight. Many shepherds quit their jobs for fear of being killed and left their sheep wandering aimlessly. One little boy had an argument with his stepfather and ran away. The authorities were not at all sympathetic and wouldn't allow the family to go looking for him. The boy's mother and sister went looking for him anyway and brought him home safely at great risk to their own safety.

When the violence in Greece subsided, parents and relatives began to inquire about repatriating their children. Those who displayed some loyalty to the Greek cause were told that their children would be allowed to return if decreed by the Greek Queen Fredericka. Unfortunately this process required connections with the local Greek authorities and a lot of money, money that most Macedonians did not have. Those considered for repatriation had to meet a number of conditions including the willingness to accept permanent Hellenization. Children from Partisan families were automatically disqualified. Those who weren't willing to change their names or weren't liked for some reason were also disqualified. As the years passed fewer children were allowed to return and requests for repatriation continued to be ignored. Parents and relatives died and still their children were not allowed to return, not even for a visit.

After travel restrictions to countries behind the iron curtain were lifted, parents, in spite of the expense, old age and ill health, made their way to visit their children. One woman on her deathbed made her husband promise her that he would visit their daughter in Poland before he died. Feeling his own mortality the man, in poor health, made the long trek and after thirty years of separation saw his daughter for the first time. She will never forget her father's sacrifice.

Another woman who let all four of her children (two sons and two daughters) leave during the dreaded May 1948 evacuation also made the trek to Poland to see them for the last time. The woman was crippled from a war wound and could hardly walk but knew that soon she would die and wanted to see her children one last time. She traveled by train and in spite of her condition made it to Poland in good spirits. When she arrived, two of her children, a son and a daughter, came to greet her. The daughter recognized her mother and after a long and emotional hug asked her if she knew which daughter she was. Her mother would not answer because she didn't know and didn't want to make a mistake. That deeply troubled the adult daughter who began to weep uncontrollably. She did recognize her son and called out his name but would not answer her daughter's pleas. After a while she finally recognized her, wiped her tears and with a wide smile called out her name. It was an emotional but happy ending for that family. Unfortunately for every happy ending there are dozens of sad ones. One old couple did not have enough money or the strength to make the trip to visit their children. Since then both have passed on heartbroken, with their desire to see their children one last time unfulfilled.

Many of the people I interviewed don't know why the Greek authorities wouldn't allow the children to return. In spite of pleas, even on humanitarian grounds, the Greek authorities decade after decade, government after government, maintain the same policy and would not allow the Macedonian refugee children to return home.

After the war was over and all the remaining Partisans were captured or killed, people who were evacuated by the Greek authorities were slowly allowed to go home to their own villages. While many returned to their old homes a few families decided to make the new village their home. Some lost their farm equipment, tools, livestock and personal belongings to looters. For most life had to start all over. As tensions began to ease, those held in concentration camps were released and began to arrive home only to find their property gone. The Greek authorities, in addition to confiscating the properties of many of those who fled as refugees during the mass exodus of 1949, also confiscated the properties of those held in concentration camps.

In time people became demoralized and lived in constant fear of the authorities and retribution from their collaborators. There was a certain stigma attached to the relatives of Partisans or their supporters that caused

them to withdraw from society and keep to themselves. Those who served in the Greek concentration camps were constantly harassed with curfews, restricted mobility and suspicion of espionage. Many were followed by plainclothes policemen and pressured to become informants and spy on their neighbours. Strangers were viewed with suspicion and automatically assumed to be foreign spies.

As radios became affordable people began to purchase them and listen to various programs, including broadcasts from Eastern Europe and the Republic of Macedonia. The Greek police became vigilant and on many occasions were observed outside people's yards listening to hear what programs were playing. Those caught listening to foreign programs were accused of espionage. The Macedonian language was once again banned from use and the "M" word became a dirty word even if it was spoken on the radio. Ever since Greece invaded the Macedonian territory, successive Greek Governments refused to acknowledge the existence of the Macedonian language.

One by one, all those who came back from the Eastern European countries left for Canada, the USA and Australia because they could no longer stand the Greek oppression. They had tasted freedom and wanted more even if it meant abandoning their beloved ancestral homes. They remembered how life was before the latest Greek clampdown and now it was not the same. The people had changed also, they were still courteous and kind but their spirits were broken. Everyone was afraid, careful not to say anything incriminating as if every word was going to be judged and punished. Children born during this time were brought up believing that this was how life was and it was supposedly the best life one could have. They were taught to understand that Greece was the cradle of democracy and no one in the world was freer than the Greeks. Those who knew better did not dare speak. There were certain things that could not be done or discussed, especially the Greek Civil War. Children were taught Greek chauvinist songs in school and sang them at home in front of their parents who didn't dare say anything. Even their children could unwittingly betray them. The Macedonian language became "our" language and could only be spoken in secrecy with relatives and trusted friends. The word "Macedonia" or "Macedonian" was banned from the peoples' vocabulary and could not be spoken, especially in public. Pre-school children who learned "our" language at home from their grandmothers spoke Greek with a heavy accent and were constantly teased and scolded for not knowing how to speak properly. If a child was caught speaking "our" language in class or in the yard, punishment ensued which varied from being publicly humiliated and told not to speak "those filthy words" to being given a good dose of castor oil. Sometimes children sang Greek songs about the deeds of the Greek heroes and broke their parents' hearts. Their precious children were unknowingly idolizing the true criminals and murderers; Macedonia's

worst enemies. Some parents, when their children were old enough to keep a secret, taught them that they were a different people, that they were Macedonian, not Greek. Other parents, thinking that it was in the best interest of the children not to know their true identity, allowed them to believe that they were Greek. Their loyalties however were never rewarded since it was very rare for a Macedonian child to be accepted in Greek society. It was not because Macedonian children were incapable of being intellectual, as the Greeks would have us believe, but because the Greek Government systemically discriminated against Macedonians. Discrimination was common practice especially at the individual level. Macedonians were constantly put down and as a result kept to themselves. Sometimes, however, during heated discussions or unavoidable arguments Macedonians did show discontentment but the arguments always ended with the lethal insult of being called a "Bulgar", the lowest form of life known to Greeks. The highest level of education a Macedonian child was permitted to achieve was grade six. Junior high was possible only for the children of those who had shown and continued to show loyalty to the Greek cause. One young man whose parents were killed during the Greek Civil War joined the Greek military and afterwards considered the army to be his only family. He was very loyal, studious and hard working but was constantly denied promotions. During a military exercise he saved a high-ranking officer from drowning. For saving his life the officer promised to help him if he ever needed it. After years of frustration finally the young soldier went to the officer with his complaint. After some investigation the officer advised him that his requests for a promotion were turned down because he was not Greek, more specifically because his parents were of "Slav origin". This unfair treatment angered the young soldier enough to leave the Greek military, the only family he had ever known. Disheartened he left Greece altogether and joined his aunt in Toronto, Canada where he is currently learning to speak Macedonian and English. Even though he speaks no other language, he refuses to speak Greek.

After the fall of the dictatorship in Greece, in the mid-sixties, many Macedonians were publicly encouraged by the Greek politicians to leave Greece because "there was no future for them there". Many of the empty villages in Western Greek occupied Macedonia were filled with Albanians from west central Greece. Vlachs who originally lived in the highlands of Thessaly and spent summers in the Macedonian mountains took up permanent residence in Macedonia. Many applied for and were granted the properties of post-Greek Civil War migrant Macedonian families.

Macedonians who immigrated to Canada, the USA and Australia at the start of the 20th century organized village associations to assist fellow immigrants in adjusting to their new countries. As post-Greek Civil War immigration accelerated, these village associations became a haven for new immigrants and their membership grew. Encouraged by their

newfound freedoms, many of the new émigrés enjoyed their Macedonian culture and language in the Diaspora. This was perceived as a threat to Greek influence both at home and abroad. As the associations grew in strength so did their threat to the Greek chokehold. To counter this, with help from the Greek Embassies and Consulates, pro-Greek factions began to infiltrate the Macedonian associations. The weaker associations were overpowered and rendered ineffective. Those that resisted managed to survive and preserve their unique Macedonian identity. For the ones that the Greeks could not subdue, parallel and competing pro-Greek associations were formed. The day a Macedonian association held an event the pro-Greek association held a similar event, to divide the people. Macedonians wishing to participate in events and prone to blackmail were discouraged from joining the Macedonian organizations and encouraged to join the pro-Greek ones. To this day many Macedonians will not go to either of the events fearing retribution from both the Greeks if they went to Macedonian events or fearing disappointment and disgust from the Macedonians if they went to a pro-Greek event. This is precisely why the Macedonian community in the Diaspora has become a silent community. This suits the Greeks perfectly and leaves the Macedonians frustrated and disappointed.

The most anti-Macedonian organization to surface from all the Greek associations is the Pan Macedonian Association, which aims to not only divide the Macedonian Nation but also destroy everything that is Macedonian. To this day this organization preys on the weak, innocent, naïve and those who can be bought and continues to spread hatred and lies at every opportunity. The Pan Macedonian Association is a "false Macedonian organization" fully financed by Greek taxpayers most of whom are unaware of its discriminatory practices and the hatred and friction it creates between fellow Greek citizens.

In addition to disseminating anti-Macedonian propaganda and lobbying for "the Greek cause", many of these so-called "Greek-Macedonian" organizations spy on Macedonian organizations and individuals, reporting their activities to the Greek authorities. Many activists and supporters of the Macedonian cause, even though they are Greek citizens, are barred from returning to Greece. Their cause is noble if they serve the Greeks at their own expense but as soon as they attempt to serve their own interests they suddenly become traitors.

Macedonians are refused entry into Greece at the border points without any explanation. Without consent their passport is stamped "void" and thrown back at them. They do the same to individuals with foreign passports without respect for the foreign State's property.

After years of living in Australia one man decided to visit the Republic of Macedonia. Upon entry his passport was stamped with a beautiful red symbol, a real treasure, which made him very proud and happy. His visit to

Macedonia was so wonderful that he decided to cross over into Greece and visit Nered, the village where he was born. Unfortunately the Greek customs officials would not allow him entry. What was most unbelievable is that the Greek officer took the man's Australian passport without his consent and stamped it "void" all over. He literally destroyed the Macedonian symbol by repeatedly stamping "void" over and over until it was no longer visible. No explanation or apology was given.

The Macedonian Refugee Children wish to express their gratitude to the countries and people who opened their doors to them at a time of their greatest need. They treated them not as strangers or immigrants, but as equals. They also wish to express many thanks to the countries and people for giving them the opportunity of free education in their institutions. Only through their generosity away from Greek bias did the Macedonian children prove themselves equal to all the children in the world. Free from Greek oppression they excelled in education and talent becoming professors, doctors, engineers, poets, playwrights, composers, economists, etc.

Most of the refugee children today are living in the Diaspora. A great number of them have immigrated to Canada, the USA, Australia and the Republic of Macedonia. Some remained in their host countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Germany and Russia) and have made these countries their home. They maintain contact with each other through associations and clubs and from time to time meet, attempting to gain entry to visit their homeland. Unfortunately to this day they have had no success. Greece, after sixty, still does not want them, not even to visit.

## The Greek Prison Camps - Nikola's Story

This is Nikola's story, a Macedonian man who at nineteen was snatched from his family and sent to the Greek prison camps where he endured five years of isolation, humiliation and beatings at the hands of the Greek authorities.

I will be telling Nikola's story in first person just the way I head it myself. Nikola is my father.

It was April 17, 1947, an ordinary spring day when the serenity of the village was broken by a man's loud voice calling everyone to gather at the village square. I was overtaken with curiosity as I rushed to get there as soon as I could. Something important must be happening I thought when I heard the church bells ringing. Nothing had prepared me for what was about to happen.

When I got there I saw soldiers, about thirty of them, in Greek military uniforms. One of them was an officer with a piece of paper in his hand looking anxious as he paced back and forth waiting for everyone to arrive. "What's going on I asked?" All I got were shrugged shoulders, no one knew. The whispers from the crowd went silent when the officer asked loudly if everyone was there. "Yes." replied a man from behind the crowd.

The officer read a list of names, including my own. When he finished he told us to immediately report to the main road at the bottom of the village and wait there. Fourteen of us stepped forward and joined the patrol. "Is this all of them?" the officer yelled out. "Yes." replied the man again from behind the crowd. We all walked in silence as I looked around and saw my friends and neighbours. We were men of mixed ages from boys younger than I to grandfathers. When we reached our destination we were moved into the meadows away from the road and told to lie flat on our stomachs, face down. It seemed like hours had passed when I heard a familiar voice calling my name. It was my little sister. My mother, worrying about me going hungry, sent some food.

The silence was broken again when I heard sounds of trucks coming. "Everyone on your feet, we are going to Lerin." announced the officer. No one dared speak, as we all boarded the trucks.

On the way to Lerin we saw Oshchimians walking on the road and called out to them not to go home, they too were in danger.

As the trucks rumbled through the dusty meandering roads to Lerin I couldn't help but wonder what was going to happen to us. I couldn't understand why they were taking us and for how long. What had we done?

It was evening when we arrived. The soldiers escorted us into the yard of Tole's hotel. The area was crowded with about two hundred men of all ages. I recognized some of them from neighbouring villages. By dusk we

were escorted at gunpoint into the boarded up hotel and locked up for the night. All through the night I could hear silent whispers of men asking questions wondering what would happen but I heard no answers. The night was long and cold and I didn't get any sleep. Through the cracks of the boards I could see the sky becoming lighter. Suddenly, I felt my heart pounding as the serenity of the night was broken by a loud noise from behind. The door flung open and a couple of guards loudly proclaimed it was morning and time to get out.

We were all escorted out to the yard, divided up into teams of a dozen and driven out to various locations to work. Some of us were sent to dig bunkers and others to lay barbed wire fences. We worked from dawn to dusk that day without provisions. We were thankful to the generosity of fellow Macedonians who took pity on us and gave us some food and water. After we got back from work I sent word home for clothes, blankets and money to buy food.

Three days later two men from Oshchima came and brought me a pair of shorts, a blanket and some food. My family had no money so I relied on the generosity of others to support me. Some of the captives were leaders of organizations and were able to obtain provisions for those that couldn't afford any. No one was left to starve. By law we were entitled to one tenth of a drahma a day (four drahmas bought a loaf of bread) but even then we were cheated by the commanding officer who bought himself a radio with our money.

As the days passed we spent the daytime working building bunkers and stretching barbed wire or in lockup in the dark rooms of the hotel. We spent the nighttime in the outdoors sleeping in the crowded yard of the police station. The police station was surrounded by a three-meter high barbed wire fence, to keep us in, and was guarded from the rooftop by guards armed with machine guns. A notice was posted at the front door warning the Partisans that "we would die first" if they dared attack the police station. We were being used as human shields. I remember one dark rainy night in May the police escorted us inside the hotel (out of the rain) when the shelling started. It was too late to take us back, so they quickly locked us up in the hotel for the night. Three or four policemen, upset about the Partisan attack, tried to get in and turn their guns on us. But the officer in charge offered them a different option. He told them, "If you want to kill someone go where the fighting is." No one died that night. The next night the rain returned and again we were rushed into the hotel. The day after we found out a shell had landed and exploded in the police station yard that night. Many of us would have died had we stayed there.

Months passed and no word as to why we were still held prisoners. Lawyers came and went and still no one was released. People told us not to waste our money on lawyers, as they couldn't do anything for us.

As the days passed, some of the captives were taken from lockup and executed. We found out some were accused of collaborating with the Partisans and others of sabotage. As I learned more of their fate I began to worry about my own future. Not too long ago I too was involved in some deeds that could have brought me the death penalty. I was involved in cutting communication lines and removing telephone wires from Orovnik to Zhelevo. I helped cut up and burn the wooden bridge at Kamenlivada. Before that I helped the Macedonian Partisans escape an attack from the Greek Partisans. I remember that day well. A friend of mine and I were cutting shuma (oak branches) when a man from Oshchima saw Greek Partisans advancing towards Prespa. With axes in our hands and torbi (food sacks) over our shoulders we ran from Oshchima to Rambi to warn the Partisans. We were smart to bypass P'pli to avoid the Greek police that was stationed there. When we arrived we met up with Mito Tupurkovski, a Partisan officer and fellow Oshchimian, and gave him the news. The Partisans in Prespa (Rambi) were all Macedonians and were being chased by the Greek Partisans for disobeying orders. The Greeks wanted them to go south and defend Epirus but the Macedonians refused the order and stayed where they were to defend their homeland. For that they were branded traitors and chased out of the country.

Mito immediately gave orders for the brigade to assemble. The bugler sounded the alarm and the men tanning and relaxing in the sun assembled and were ready to march. I remember it was before dinnertime and beans were boiling in a large cauldron. There was no time to eat so two men tipped the cauldron sending the soup rolling down the slope like a flood. The brigade was too large to be accommodated in one village so it split up into three groups. Some went to spend the night in Dupeni and Nakolets and the rest went to Ljubojno. We spent the night in Nakolets. The next day my friend and I crossed over the Yugoslav border and went with Mito's group to Ljubojno. We asked Mito for advice on what to do. He recommended we arm and join his Brigade, if not to fight then to defend ourselves. Having prior engagements and obligations at home, we declined the offer, said our good-bye and left for home. On the way back when we caught up with the enemy patrols, they saw us with axes in our hands and food bags over our shoulders and they naturally assumed we were coming back from work. They let us pass without a hassle and we arrived home safely.

That was not all I had done in my time that could have landed me in hot water. During the occupation (1940 – 1945) I operated as a Partisan in Oshchima. With the outbreak of the Greek–Italian war and later the German invasion (April 6th 1941), living conditions in the region became harsh and Partisan activities began to escalate. Later (1943) as Partisans became more organized, activities intensified and drew assistance from the local population. Like many boys and girls my age, I joined the youth

organizations voluntarily. Because I was too young for combat I was given non-combat duties. My activities were confined to Oshchima and the surrounding region. For the most part, I was responsible for guard duty, delivering messages between command posts and smuggling people through the German lines. I remember one time while walking through a German camp, stationed near Oshchima, I overheard two men speaking in Greek. I approached them and found out they were Greeks from Epirus. A number of them were caught and imprisoned by the Germans. They wanted to escape but were afraid. They didn't know the terrain well enough to do it on their own. I agreed to help them and gave them instructions to meet me at the base of the camp after dark. To my surprise, twenty-seven of them were waiting when I showed up. I took them through the back of the village and by secluded paths to Mount Gomnush. From the hilltop I showed them the road to Statitsa and left. A few weeks later a column of men walking out of the forest approached me. They called me over to see if I could identify someone among them. I said I didn't know anyone. One of them with a big smile on his face then told me that he was one of the men I had helped escape that night and he had just joined the Partisans. One by one the men shook my hand and congratulated me for my deeds.

Twenty years later I recall sitting in a cafe in Kostur where I overheard a man telling a story. I couldn't believe my ears. It was my story, and the man telling it was one of the men I had helped twenty years ago. I went over to his table and politely asked if he would be able to identify the boy in his story. He said he wouldn't, it was so long ago. After introducing myself we were both happy and thankful that we were both alive and that fate had brought us together again.

As I sit there, locked up in the dark room of the God-forsaken hotel, I worry about the fate of my family. My father is sixty-four years old and sick, he can't look after the farm anymore. Besides he was never a good farmer, he always depended on us (his children) to do the farming. He was good at making money though, as a petchalbar (migrant worker). In his quests for work he traveled to Epirus, Anadol (Anatolia Turkey) and even worked in Canada a few times, but he was most famous for his excellent painting and stone laying work. Everyone in the region especially in Prespa knew Barba Risto from Oshchima as the best chimney builder in the region.

My oldest brother is dead. He died in 1943 from a burst appendix. He was only twenty-two years old, just barely married when he died. He was the hardest worker in my family.

My oldest sister too has her own tragedy. At age thirty-seven with five children she lost her husband (Partisan) at the hands of the Greeks.

My older brother and sister are both Partisans now. My brother is a courier running correspondence between Gramos and Vitcho. My sister,

married with two young girls, is a field medic transporting dead and wounded Partisans between battlefields and field hospitals.

I am Nikola, Risto and Sofia's fifth child. I was born in Oshchima in 1927 and I am in jail now and I don't know why.

Later, I would learn that my youngest sister and brother were both taken by the Partisans, leaving mother and father all alone. My youngest sister was only sixteen when she was taken in 1947. In 1949 she fought in the unsuccessful and bloody battle to occupy Lerin. My youngest brother was twelve when he left with the refugee children in 1948. After spending a year in Romania he was brought back by the Greek Partisans to fight. Many like him, young and inexperienced, died fighting against the battle seasoned Greek army. My brother was only saved because many brave mothers, in protest, stood up to the Greek Partisans and stopped them from sending innocent children to slaughter.

I miss my family very much as I lie here in this overcrowded, stench ridden dark hellhole. I can only dream of freedom, of enjoying the serenity of village life, of enjoying my mother's cooking and of drinking cold crystalline clear water from the springs of Oshchima. My dreams are often interrupted by the harsh reality of hunger pain, thirst, aching muscles and my own anxiety. As if that is not enough, I also have to endure the cruelty and humiliation of the police and soldiers who blame us for their own miseries.

To make our lives even more miserable, the police one summer day hung twenty-three decapitated human heads on the fence where we slept. The heads hung over us, reeking of the stench of death, for three long days. They were placed there out of hatred for the Partisans and to remind us of what would happen if we tried anything. The guards told us the dead men were traitors and blood thirsty Partisans, but it was not the truth. I recognized a couple of them and they were innocent farmers who probably crossed paths with the bloodthirsty Greek police.

Months have passed since we were first detained and still we are here and don't know why. Families, the community and concerned citizens often protest demanding our release but nothing is done.

After months of complaining, finally one day we got an answer. We were told we were being detained because we are "a danger to the security of the Greek State". No reason was disclosed as to how and why we are a danger.

After being detained for one hundred and five days, without a trial, we were sentenced to prison for an undisclosed prison term, to be served at the Greek concentration prison camps.

With that they took us from Lerin to Solun, first by train (part way) then by trucks. I remember the train tracks were damaged and we had to get off in the middle of a watermelon farm. The workers wanted to give us

watermelons but were not allowed to come near so they resorted to throwing them at us.

It was early morning when we arrived in Solun. We drove around the city from jail to jail looking for space. There was no space for us anywhere. All the jails were full. By the end of the day we were taken to a nearby camp just outside the city limits. There, we were merged with a less fortunate group who told us that they were used as human shields by the Greeks. The military often traveled in convoys and loaded lead trucks with prisoners from this camp in case the road was mined. This served as a reminder for the Partisans that if they dared to do something they would be killing their own people.

We spent two days in Solun waiting for prisoners to arrive before we were loaded up in ferries and shipped out to the concentration camps.

Twelve hundred of us were sent to the island of Aistrati (Agios Evstratios) located in the center of the Aegean Sea. When we arrived, there were already two thousand captives settled, which made the camp look like a city of tents. We spent the entire day floating in the harbour waiting to offload. It was a hot, sunny August day and the ferry was overcrowded, lacked facilities, food and drinking water. When we disembarked they dumped us among the others and left us without provisions. We were entitled to 1.5 drachmas a day but it took months before we saw any of it. In the meantime we relied on those already settled to feed us. Luckily, we were allowed to grow vegetables within the confines of the camp, which helped relieve the food shortage. We were also allowed to work during the day for pay within the locality of the island.

For a while we were allowed to roam within the confines of the island unabated. After the authorities got organized they were determined to encircle our camp with barbed wire. We angrily protested and after pleading to the United Nations they abandoned the plan. After that, they selectively separated about three hundred of us, myself included, and relocated us in a valley next to the main camp and placed us under armed guard. We were grouped twelve people to a tent. Twice a day one person from each tent was allowed to pick up provisions from the main camp. Three times a day we were required to report for roll call. Without exception, three times a day the roll call alarm was sounded just as we would start eating.

No one could have survived alone with the meager allowances they gave us. To survive we had to pool our resources and negotiate prices to purchase provisions wholesale from the mainland. We did our own cooking, cleaning and improvements to the camp.

In February 1949, all prisoners under the age of thirty-two were mobilized from the various concentration camps and shipped out to a military camp on the island of Makronisos located south east of Athens. There, about six hundred of us formed the first battalion. Living conditions

in Makronosos were much worse than in Aistrati. We were under the constant watch of the military police who used agitation, abuse, beatings, starvation, and humiliation to control us. They were ordered by higher authorities to break our spirits. Many of the guards even enjoyed their jobs. I remember one particular guard who took pleasure in torturing. He was a small and loud man who loved to use his heels on the bodies of his victims. He frothed at the mouth as he exerted himself kicking prisoners and screaming profanities at them in the service of his country. I also remember one day when he came back from vacation, a changed man. We found out that he had spent a month in the hospital in Athens after meeting up with some of his former victims.

Micronisos was by far the worst experience in my life. No one and nothing deserves to be treated the way we were. Routinely in the hottest hours of the day, we were forced to run up hill single file between two rows of policemen, while they beat us with sticks to unconsciousness. Rarely did anyone make it to the top standing. It was a sad sight to see especially the streams of blood running downhill painting the sand red. What was even sadder was the aftermath, the humiliation of being forced to sign false confessions of acts we never committed and on top swear loyalty to the same regime that imprisoned and beat us.

After a while many of the captives became crazed with fear and had to be isolated in wire cages. Even a glimpse of a uniform threw them into a frightful screaming fit.

On many occasions we had visits from the Greek and sometimes the foreign (French and English) press but no one dared complain. The same policemen that tortured us were walking among us exchanging uniform for prison clothes every time we had visitors. The press was reporting fair treatment and compared our prison to paradise with our blessings. In fact we were so afraid that we would have agreed with anything. If the guards said pigs fly we would agree. At one point the authorities were so convinced of our rehabilitation that they allowed us to vote in the national elections. To their surprise we didn't vote the way they expected. The elections however, brought change and improvements to our situation. We could finally complain without the fear of retribution. Unfortunately, everyone was so convinced by the exemplary reports in the press that no one believed us. Even the minister of corrections who paid us a visit in person one day refused to believe us. He found the mere mention of abuse preposterous until some of the men, one by one, dropped their drawers to show him their mutilated genitals. He and his visitors were so shocked at the sight that they brought up charges against the general in charge.

The abuses inflicted upon us were not limited to our bodies, we were forced to work for free like slaves and on top of that we were robbed of our prisoner entitlements. With our money they purchased building materials and with our labour we built them sleeping quarters, offices and

recreational facilities. Even after we complained, not even a drahma was returned to us. We had to do with very little to survive. We survived because we were able to organize the people into a skillful labour force willing to work for anyone and for whatever they could afford to pay us.

After almost two years of enduring life in the military camp, it was time for some of us to be released. To qualify however, each had to sign a statement admitting to crimes and swearing loyalty to Greece (the ruling regime). We were given two choices. Sign a confession and leave or remain a prisoner. We were allowed to withdraw previously signed confessions given that most were signed under duress. Macedonians received the most abuse. How could one tell a Macedonian from a Greek, by his confession? Without exception all Macedonians, even the uneducated farmers, were accused of being members of the Communist Party. To the Greek regime at that time it was the worst crime one could ever commit.

In time, one by one we abandoned our ideals and gave in to the pressures of our captors. I remained loyal to the end. I roamed the campgrounds alone for three months often wondering what wrong I had done to deserve this.

In 1950 all remaining captives (about fifty) were rounded up by armed guards, tied up at the hands in pairs and shipped out to the port of Lavrion located on the mainland near Athens. Three of us were civilians, the rest were captured Partisans (prisoners of war). When we arrived we were taken off the ship and left tied up. Without provisions in the outdoors, we waited for two days before the authorities came to pick us up. We were driven to the port of Piraeus and from there were taken to Crete to a place called Souda near Khania. We spent the first night in the local jail with some local criminals before we were released to the streets.

I must mention that at the same time we arrived in Crete a crisis was brewing in the community. It involved the kidnapping of the daughter of a politician from the right wing party, by the son of a prominent man from the left wing party. We were left to fend for ourselves for forty days before the crisis was diffused and the authorities turned their attention to us. We spent two days hungry on the streets before a woman, in passing, showed some interest in us. She wanted to know where we were from. We told her most of us were from Lerin. She too was from Lerin, married to a civil servant in the local government. She took pity on us and got her husband, who had access to army-surplus supplies, to help us out. She gave us some pots, plates and utensils while her husband provided us with canned beans, canned meat and canned sardines. Through family connections she also found us some work at a government construction project. Even some of the local people took pity on us and occasionally donated food and clothing.

When the kidnapping crisis was over the authorities split us up into three groups. Twelve of us were sent to Dafnes a village near Iraklion located in the center of Crete. When we arrived we were dumped in front of the police station and told to set up quarters in a wet basement. We refused to stay in the wet and for a while we lived on the streets. To keep us from causing trouble, the authorities offered our services to the locals in exchange for room and board. I took on a job as a cobbler's assistant but I was no good at it so the boss fired me. He said he hired me to make profit, not to support me. Another man offered me a job digging ditches in his vineyard. After I finished one ditch he took me to another place. There I met a couple of young men my age that were working for a neighbour. Out of curiosity I asked how much they were making? Eighty drahmas a day was the going rate. Discouraged by the fact that I was working for nothing, a few days later I quit. As well as working for nothing, the farmer hardly cared about me and often left me without provisions. After that I joined four others who had done the same. We pooled our resources and rented a run down warehouse for forty drahmas a month. We did odd jobs in the community to earn money for expenses.

By now I was getting desperate about going home and seriously began to look at ways to get out. Of all the civilian people from the community that I asked for help only two showed any interest. They advised me to retain a lawyer and recommended one in the city of Iraklion. One day, together with another man I went and met with the lawyer. Before he would help me though he recommended I bring him letters of character reference. With those, he would make appeals on my behalf through official channels. I did as he asked and then waited. Months passed and no reply. It appeared that all my inquiries were ignored, my pleas fell on deaf ears. At one point I got so upset that I stormed into the police station and demanded to see the police chief. He was kind enough to see me and offered to answer my questions. Without hesitation I got to the point and bluntly asked, "Why am I still here?" He was honest enough to tell me that as far as my record was concerned his office had nothing against me, the problem was at the Lerin district. He told me, "Your neighbours don't want you back." On his advice I then petitioned the Ministry of the Interior.

A month later, the local police sent me to the Iraklion office where I got news of my release. The same police chief I visited earlier gave me my papers to freedom. I was so happy I decided to spend the night in the city. I rented a hotel room and even went to see a movie.

The next day walking down the street I was stormed by the police and arrested for skipping town without permission. I showed them my release papers but they refused to recognize them. They had papers of their own they said and I had to serve more time.

Locked up in a cell I pleaded with them to talk to the chief but they refused. Finally, one of them went to the post office (the police station had no telephone) and called the ministry. When he came back he apologized and released me. My papers superceded those from the Lerin district and I was a free man. The next day I got my ticket and left. I was eligible for free transportation but I had to go back to the police station to obtain it. I didn't want to go back so I paid my own fare. I took the ferry from the port of Piraeus to Solun then the train from Solun to Lerin and arrived in Oshchima on January 17th, 1952, penniless and with no material possessions.

I found my home empty, looted of all our possessions. Everything was gone, my father's tools, our farming tools, furniture and clothing, everything. My parents, along with ninety-percent of Oshchimians, abandoning everything and fled the country in a hurry to avoid death by Greek bombs. When the war was over no one was allowed to return. My entire family was now gone and I was left all alone.

The day after my arrival, as required, I reported to the police station in Zhelevo. I showed the authorities my release papers and in return I received my identification card and travel pass which restricted me to a radius of thirty kilometers.

Three days later I received a summons to report to the military headquarters at Zhelevo. The moment I walked into the office, the man in charge looked at me and said, "You will die at a blink of an eye." He then told me to turn around and go home. To this day I am still pondering the meaning of his remark.

A day later I received another summons to report to Zhelevo for an interview with the plain-clothes police. When I inquired why I was summoned, one of them asked me what was happening in Oshchima. To this I recounted my day's activities, i.e. what I did that day, which fields I visited, and so on. He then asked me not to be naive and to tell him what he was interested in, i.e. my neighbours activities, not my own. After telling him that I didn't associate much with my neighbours, he got upset and told me to leave and come back the next day. When I asked why I had to come back his reply was, "To keep an eye on you." His smart remark made me mad so I sarcastically said "Why don't you give me a bed next to yours so that way you can keep an eye on me all the time, even when I am asleep?" He became furious and told me off. He then changed his mind and told me to see him once a week on Sundays.

The next Sunday he again asked me, "What is happening in your village?" Again I gave him the same answer. This time he told me to get lost and never come back, which suited me fine. I think he was trying to turn me into a collaborator to spy on my neighbours.

A little while later, the police again summoned me to Zhelevo. This time they gave me a letter with instructions to report to the military

authorities in Maniuk, Kostur. After I arrived there and showed them the letter, they told me to go back home. They said there was no need for me to be there, as they hadn't asked for me. I didn't even care to speculate about what games the police were playing with me.

A couple of years later, the plain-clothes police again summoned me to Zhelevo. This time they confiscated my travel pass. They also informed me that until further notice, I was under house arrest and confined to the borders of Oshchima. No reason was given except that I now needed permission from the chief of police to travel.

One day I got sick and needed medical attention so I went to Zhelevo and paid a visit to the police chief. The chief got furious about my leave without permission. I explained my situation that I needed to see a doctor and the closest one was in Lerin. He refused to give me a pass and made all sorts of excuses about how I could escape if he was not careful. I told him again that I was sick and needed to see a doctor. He said he needed to see a doctor's report first, to prove that I was really sick, before he could issue me a travel pass. So I asked, how was I to do that when there is no doctor in the vicinity? He said that was my problem and not his. I asked again, what am I supposed to do now, die? He said yes! Die! That will solve both our problems. I did see a doctor but without permission. A truck driver helped me out.

Another time I was going back to Oshchima from shopping in Zhelevo when suddenly a jeep screeched to a halt. It was the plain-clothes policeman. He jumped out of the jeep and started yelling at me in front of another man sitting in the jeep. "How dare you leave Oshchima without my permission?" he exclaimed. My temper was rising and I had had enough of this man so I yelled back at him. In front of his companion I said, "If you think I am so dangerous then why don't you arrest me right now, and put me away for good?" Without a word, he stormed back to his jeep and left. Two more years passed before I got my travel rights back.

I left Greece in 1965 and immigrated to Canada. I went back to visit family in the Republic of Macedonia in 1975 and decided to visit Oshchima one more time. I found my house all locked up. When I inquired, I found out a Vlah family was using it, as a barn to store winter-feed for the sheep. The new owner told me the Greek Government gave him the house and he refused to let me in. I pleaded with the man and told him I just wanted to see my house one more time. My father had built this house, I was born and raised here, my children were born and raised here. Still he refused to let me in.

I got upset and complained to the authorities in Lerin who couldn't help me either. They said, if I wanted a house they would be glad to give me one down south in Greece proper. When I showed dissatisfaction, they told me if I didn't like their answers I could sue the Greek Government. From there I went to see a lawyer who firmly advised me to drop it before

I ended up in jail. He said, “You know they are perfectly capable of sending you to jail and they will do it if you don’t stop right now.” I was still upset and after returning to the Republic of Macedonia I made a point of seeing the newspaper editor of Nova Makedonija. I asked him to write a story about my ordeal but he too refused me. The editor told me he wanted to, personally, but his country couldn’t risk upsetting relations with Greece.

## Conclusion

Whatever the rationale may have been for starting the second armed struggle in Greece, later termed the “Greek Civil War”, it did not end well for the Macedonian people. Was it planned or accidental, we will never know for sure. All we know is that it ended with the annihilation of the Macedonian people and all we can do at this juncture is examine what happened and try and draw conclusions from it. Given that the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) was responsible for leading and guiding the struggle and given how its top leadership treated the Macedonian people we can safely say that it did not have their best interest at heart. The CPG was responsible for the safety and security of the Macedonian people and it let them down. In fact given how Zahariadis and his cronies tried to blame the loss of the struggle on the Macedonian fighters, is indicative of the CPG’s attitude towards the Macedonian people. The CPG was neither a good leader nor cared for the Macedonians. But this should not be a surprise to anyone anyway given how Greeks behave towards the Macedonians in general.

When the CPG and its partners needed the Macedonians to spill their blood they offered them equality and rights but as soon as that need passed the offer was slowly withdrawn. The moment the Macedonian people showed unity and strength the CPG and its partners took action to dissolve it. Every time Macedonians showed strong leadership the CPG and its partners made sure that leadership was removed and the people behind it were vilified. This is how the CPG and its partners acted towards the Macedonians and this is how they will be remembered by the Macedonian people.

The CPG top leadership and its partners, for unknown reasons, sold out to the Republicans and Royalists at Varkiza. Then knowing full well that it would be impossible for them to win the war, especially since the Republicans and Royalists were backed by Great Powers Britain and the USA, the Democrats gave their support to initiate a second struggle.

In retrospect, intentionally or by accident, by initiating the second struggle the CPG achieved two objectives; (1) it led the democratic movement in Greece to its destruction and (2) it cleansed Greek occupied Macedonia of its Macedonian population, which had been a Greek aim since Greece acquired Macedonian territories and people in 1912, 1913.

So what exactly did the CPG and its partners achieve in Greece that can be considered positive? Absolutely nothing! The way the CPG top leadership and its partners handled the second struggle would lead one to believe that they were working for the British and Americans. The British and Americans wanted to root out the communists from Greece and the Greek Republicans and Royalists wanted to eradicate the Macedonians in

Greek occupied Macedonia. Apparently the CPG top leadership and its partners succeeded in doing both for them.

In spite of all the promises made to reward them for their effort, including those for fulfilling of the Atlantic Charter, the Macedonians in Greece received nothing. Ironically, for their vast sacrifices to free Greece and make it a better place to live, the Macedonians were “reduced” in numbers like never before. Entire villages were wiped out and reduced to rubble and even those that were not bombed were robbed of their population.

First it was the 28,000 refugee children ages 2 to 14, all removed from the villages supposedly for their own safety. Removed under the premise that they would be returned as soon as the war was over and the Democrats won. No mention was ever made of what would happen if the Democrats did not win. Then it was the villagers, pregnant women, the very young and the very old who fled to Albania to save themselves from the Greek bombs. But once they crossed the border they were told they were not welcome to return. And finally it was also the fighters, many of whom spilled blood to free Greece, who once they crossed the border were told they could never return. Sixty years later they are still not welcome in Greece, not them not even their children. Eradicating the Macedonian population was always Greece’s plan but no one would have guessed that it would be the communists who would succeed in doing it. I can’t say with any certainty that this was the “communist plan” but I guess in this case results speak better than words.

It is usually customary for a country to account for its people, even if it considers them to be criminals, but not Greece. Greece has not published any statistics to show how many people it exiled or how many it killed during the dreaded civil war. Greece did not even have the decency to bury its dead citizens, some of whose bones to this day litter the mountainside. Most societies honour their fallen, especially those who fought for change and to better their lives and those of their countrymen, but not Greece. Thousands of Macedonian Partisans, young men and women cut down in their prime, rest in unmarked mass graves waiting to be forgotten by the passing of time. How do the Greeks honour the Macedonian fighters who gave their lives to better Greece? They honoured them by burning their villages, exiling their living relatives and by denying them their most basic human rights. There is no justice for the Macedonians in Greece, not for the dead whose bones and skulls to this day litter the countryside waiting to be buried and not for the living who were ejected from their homeland sixty years ago and are now roaming the Diaspora still unwelcome to return.

As much as I want to agree with the Greeks and say the Macedonians indeed fought for an independent and united Macedonia, because that would have been my wish, the facts however tell a different story. There

were no battles ever registered of Macedonians fighting against the Greeks between 1939 and 1949. Outside of a number of small armed groups instigated by the Italian and Bulgarian Fascists there were no Macedonians openly calling for an uprising against the Greeks. It has always been the wish of the Macedonian people to live free and independent but never have they ever risen against any of their occupiers be it Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, or Albania. The Macedonians in Greece would have been content, as the Macedonians in Yugoslavia were, if they were granted human and national rights and the right to form a Macedonian republic as part of a Greek federation. Unfortunately that did not happen. The Greeks did not trust the Macedonians and acted on their worst fear, the fear that they may lose their precious Macedonia which by the way they acquired by force of arms in 1912, 1913 and against the wishes of the Macedonian people. And what is wrong with wanting to be free? If the Greeks were less oppressive and a little less paranoid and gave the Macedonians a bit of freedom then perhaps there would have been less anxiety and worry about losing Macedonia. The Macedonians would not have a reason to want to separate. Unfortunately with time the “Greek shackle” has only tightened.

What did the second armed struggle mean for the Macedonian people? Outside of losing most of the Macedonian civilian population to exile, more than 13,000 Macedonian fighters lost their lives and thousands more were executed by the military courts in Enidzhe-Vardar, Lerin, Ber, Kozheni and Solun. Thousands more were maimed in the government sponsored torture rooms and jails in Edi-Kule, in Solun, in Corfu, Ajstrati, Gavdos, Folegandros and other places. Hundreds more contracted tuberculosis and died in the Makronisos and Gjura concentration camps. Many more went mad from physical and physiological torture and those who did survive were further humiliated by being forced to take a “pledge of loyalty”. This is what the Macedonians gained by helping Greece free itself from its occupiers.

Those 45,000 or so civilian Macedonians who fled Greece to only save themselves from the Greek bombs are now permanent refugees and political emigrants. The properties and homes which they owned for centuries were confiscated and given to “Greeks with proven national feelings”. And after all which has happened and is happening to this day, Greece still calls itself a democracy!

All that the Macedonian people wanted since 1913, since they found themselves under Greek control, was to be recognized as equal citizens of the country to which they paid their taxes and served as soldiers.

What danger will Greece face if it recognizes its minorities and awards them their ethnic and national rights as prescribed by international law? What danger will Greece face if the Macedonians are allowed to speak their mother tongue without fear of repercussion, to have their own Macedonian schools, churches and cultural organizations? Absolutely

none! In fact quite the opposite may happen. By recognizing its ethnic minorities Greece will surely receive their sympathies and support. Its recognition will reassure the minorities that they are valuable citizens and that their sacrifices were not in vain and Greece will finally earn the right to call itself a democracy.

Before closing this story there are a few remaining questions that need to be asked. Did the West, particularly the USA, Canada and Australia, participate in the removal of communists from Greece after the Greek Civil War?

It is well known that many “known communists” were expelled from the USA and Canada during the 1950’s. I have also been informed that at the same time supposed communists from Greece, who wanted to immigrate to Canada, the USA and Australia, were allowed to leave Greece and were given sealed files to take with them. These sealed files were to be presented to the various customs officials where these people landed. It is alleged that the files contained personal information on these individuals, parts of which alleged them to be communists.

After landing in the destination country many of these individuals were required to report to their local police stations and those who inquired why were told because Greece had classified them as communists.

Some of these so-called communists however were not communists at all but simply Macedonians. So the questions that need to be asked here are (1) “Did Greece continue to exile Macedonians from Greece under the pretence that they were communists?” And (2) “Were the USA, Canada and Australia aware that these Macedonians were not communists at all and were exiled simply because they felt Macedonian?”

## **Ilija Dimovski – Gotse (1909-1961) - Aspiring for a Free and United Macedonia**

Ilija Dimovski – Gotse after World War II, took the name Gotse Delchev, a well known revolutionary who fought for the freedom of Macedonia, a name well connected with the evolutionary process in the struggle for freedom for the people of Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia.

Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was one of the most distinguished leaders of the Macedonian National Movement to emerge from the Aegean (Greek occupied) part of Macedonia, not only during the war period from 1939 to 1949 but also during the remainder of his life. He was a true Macedonian patriot who remained committed to the ideals and aspirations of his people who had a long desire to see a free and independent Macedonia. His name is enshrined in the annals of Macedonian history and has become synonymous with bravery in the struggle for freedom for the Macedonian people.

According to a high ranking Greek Partisan who was attending a Greek Communist Party meeting in October 1944, Ilija Dimovski - Gotse made the following statement:

**“My sole purpose in life is to fight for the freedom of Aegean Macedonia and to see all of Macedonia united and free. I will fight all who stand in my way, including the Greek Communist Party and Stalin himself if I have to”.**

Ilija was seriously committed to the Macedonian cause and truly upheld Gotse Delchev’s ideals, which he had learned from his father.

Ilija was one of the first Macedonians to take up arms against the fascists during which time he chose the alias “Gotse”. Since then at home and abroad, by friend and by foe he became forever known as Ilija Dimovski – Gotse.

Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was born in the village Statitsa, Kostur Region, in the year 1909. He came from a revolutionary family. His father Stevo was actively involved in previous conflicts including the 1903 Ilinden Uprising. He is credited for participating in the assassination of Pavlos Melas, a well known notorious Greek armed bandit. Melas was killed in Statitsa, in Stevo’s native village, on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1904.

In 1913, to escape persecution from the Greeks, Stevo and his family left their beloved Macedonia and immigrated to America where they remained until 1918.

With the money he earned in America, upon his return home Stevo purchased a house and opened a bakery in Lerin which became a place of employment for his young son Ilija.

Soon after returning home from America Stevo again became involved in the struggle for the freedom of Macedonia, this time against a new oppressor and in more drastic circumstances.

Between the two World Wars the Dimovski family became involved in the workers movements organized by the democrats, as did numerous other Macedonian families in Aegean Macedonia. Because of his activities in 1925, Stevo was accused of participating in the bombing of the “Dietnes” hotel in Lerin and was imprisoned by the Greek government. The following year, in 1926, young Ilija was also accused of committing acts against the state and he too was imprisoned. In 1928 when he was of military age, because of his progressive ideals and activities, he was enlisted by the Communist Party of Greece. Unfortunately again because of his noteworthy political activities, in 1932 he was charged with the famous antidemocratic law of being “Idionimos” (a communist without calling it such) and was imprisoned on the desolate Aistrati island concentration camp.

After he was freed from prison Ilija joined the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – United (IMRO-U) and continued his political activities.

With the arrival of the General Yannis Metaxas Monarcho-Fascist dictatorship on August 4, 1936 in Greece, Ilija was again persecuted by the Greek authorities. To avoid another jail sentence Ilija fled to Serres where he took on a job as labourer. Unfortunately the authorities again caught up with him and captured and jailed him on the island of Folerandros where he remained until 1938. In 1939 he was again captured and jailed.

When Italy declared war on Greece on October 28, 1940, Ilija, because of his political affiliations, was sent to fight on the frontlines against the Italians. With the capitulation of Greece in April 1941, Ilija returned to Lerin where he again continued his revolutionary activities. He made connections with the old democrats who had returned from the Greek prison camps and from the frontlines and again began to organize new political organizations and resistance movements. He also became involved in procuring and amassing arms, ammunition and other war materials including those the Greek military left behind on the Italian front in Albania. He formed a saboteur group called “Tsrna Raka” (“Black Arm”) in order to carry out acts of sabotage against the new occupiers (Germans, Italians and Bulgarians).

In the opinion of some functionaries from the Communist Party of Greece, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, during the first year of the German-Italian occupation, was responsible and was to be blamed for the confusion regarding the Macedonian national question. Ilija Dimovski – Gotse however was more concerned with the new division of Macedonia between Germany, Bulgaria and Italy which represented yet another misfortune for the Macedonian people. Macedonia’s new partition into three parts brought on by the three occupiers now represented yet another obstacle to Macedonia’s reunifying struggle. Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was determined to fight to free and unite Macedonia.

In 1941 a Partisan functionary for the Lerin and wider region named Stratos Kentros, among other things said: “The Slavo-Macedonians do not recognize any party or national organization outside of the Greek Communist Party. There is some confusion however between the Slavo-Macedonian leaders including Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, as to how Macedonia was to be re-united especially Greek-Macedonia with the other Macedonia which was occupied by Bulgaria. After the reunification they will definitely ask for independence for the entire Macedonia. We worked tirelessly to first bring agreement between the Slavo-Macedonian leaders, and after that we worked on the common people. To do this successfully we brought Lazo Trpovski, a functionary of the Macedonian bureau of the Communist Party of Greece, to help us. Lazo Trpovski was in charge and oversaw our party organizations.”

Similar statements about Macedonian efforts to reunite Macedonia and Ilija Dimovski – Gotse’s involvement can also be found in other Greek Communist Party documents.

In 1941 a bid was made by the Bulgarian People’s Communist Party to take over the Macedonian party organization in the Vardar part of Macedonia. The same bid was also made in Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia in 1941 when Hristo Kalajdzhev arrived in Lerin and made contact with Ilija Dimovski – Gotse. Aware of the latest Bulgarian communist tactics Ilija Dimovski – Gotse intervened and strongly objected to the takeover rendering Kalajdzhev’s mission unsuccessful. Ilija Dimovski – Gotse had already made contact with the Peoples’ Liberation Organization in the Vardar side of Macedonia and was already working with them.

Early in 1941 Ilija Dimovski – Gotse illegally crossed the border to Bitola and established links with the Bitola Region Party Organization. Then in late 1941 early 1942 an illegal courier service was established between Bitola and Lerin.

According to unconfirmed sources, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse organized and participated in various meetings with Kuzman Josifovski – Pitu, Steve Naumov, Orde Chopela and others. During one of these meetings, which took place in the village Oshchima in the summer of 1944, representatives of the Vardar Macedonian Organization asked if they could have their Partisan Units stay in the Vicho-Gramos region if necessary, but the traitor Nikos Puptis, of the regional committee of the Communist Party of Greece for Kostur Region, said no, explaining that “such an act would expose the people in the region to reprisals from the occupier.”

Ilija Dimovski – Gotse received much praise from the fighters of Bitola Region for the care he showed towards them.

With the break in the conflict during the month of April, 1942 more and more fighters began to join the ranks of the Partisans which lead to the formation of the “Pelister” detachment on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1942. In September of

the same year an even larger number of fighters and activists from Bitola were given orders to cross the border into Lerin and become involved in the conflict. During their stay in Lerin they were well looked after by Macedonian patriots and by Ilija Dimovski – Gotse who was responsible for their security and for their provisions and other needs.

Here is what Gavro Panovski had to say in his texts: "...the detachment 'Yane Sandanski' in the first days of December 1942 crossed over the border and held out for several days in the village Opsirino, Lerin Region. Our fighters were welcomed by the local community and by Ilija Dimovski – Gotse. The local people were all followers and supporters of our movement..."

Besides fighting against the Fascist occupier, the fighters from Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia were leading an exhausting fight against the armed counter-bands (local bands organized and armed by the Italians), particularly in the Lerin and Kostur Regions, which were eventually disarmed with help from the Macedonian fighters from Vardar Macedonia.

On account of Ilija Domovski – Gotse's participation and contribution in the National Struggle for Liberation in Vardar Macedonia, he earned a Partisan honourable mention in 1941.

After long indecision, the Communist Party of Greece, during the Second World Conference held in December 1942, finally decided to lead a massive armed struggle against the occupier.

Based on that decision, in early 1943 a number of Partisans were deployed in groups in Lerin Region, among whom was Ilija Dimovski – Gotse.

According to one source on February 28<sup>th</sup>, according to another on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943, the Partisan detachment "Vicho", lead by Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, was formed in the village Lagen. A few days later Bitola Partisans from Vardar Macedonia also joined the Vicho detachment. Among those included were the brothers Anesti and Gavro Panovski, Trajche Gruevski and Kole Stefanovski. The Vicho detachment represented a practical expression of the brotherly cooperation between the freedom movements in Aegean and Vardar Macedonia, a detachment formed by Macedonians from two regions.

Here is what Lazo Hadzhi Popovski had to say: "During the winter of 1942 when a number of Macedonians from Vardar Macedonia, belonging to the 'Pelister', 'Dame Gruev' and 'Yane Sandanski' detachments, illegally crossed the border into Aegean Macedonia and spent the winter there, a connection (a brainchild of the Lerin Region Organization, B.M.) was made between these people and the Greek party which resulted in cooperation and joint operations. This was of great political and military importance and resulted in the formation of the first Partisan detachment in the Lerin Region in the spring of 1943 with Ilija Dimovski – Gotse as its commanding officer."

In mid-1943, the Bitola-Prespa detachment “Yane Sandanski” which, by orders from general headquarters of the Peoples’ Liberation Front in Vardar Macedonia was sent to Lerin Region, near Lerin, to form close ties with “Vicho”, the Lerin Partisan detachment.

During one of the leadership meetings between the two detachments the following items were discussed:

1. The detachments will remain separated and will be lead by their own commanders unless emergency defensive action is required in which case the detachments will be coordinated by central command.
2. The detachments will strive to gain the trust of the Macedonian population in Greece and elicit its support to fight against the Italian and German occupiers.
3. The detachments will declare war against the Greek and Bulgarian propaganda in the territory of Lerin and Kostur Regions.
4. The detachments will be responsible for disarming the counter-bands organized by the Italians.
5. The detachments will be responsible for leading a propaganda campaign designed to bring the Macedonian and Greek people closer together and to further isolate them from the Fascist Greek and Bulgarian propaganda.
6. All communications between the detachments and the local people should be done in the Macedonian language because the people in the Lerin and Kostur Regions are predominantly Macedonian.
7. How the Macedonian question is answered (with emphasis) will depend on the Macedonian people alone. The drawing of borders will be determined later. The most important actions to be taken today will be jointly waging a war against a common enemy. The Macedonian Partisans will be fighting to free Macedonia and the Greek Partisans will be fighting to free Greece in a united effort. Together we can defeat the enemy.

All detachment meetings held with the people in the Lerin and Kostur Region villages were conducted in both Macedonian and Greek. As planned the meetings served as platforms for gathering and informing the people on current politics and the war situation. As a result of these activities more and more armed Macedonians (armed by the occupier) surrendered their arms and joined the ranks of the Partisans.

On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1943 in the village Prekopana, Lerin Region, the “Gotse Delchev” detachment was formed by combining fighters from the “Dame Gruev” detachment and from the newly recruited fighters.

The formation of the “Gotse Delchev” detachment was welcomed by Naum Shupurkovski - Leon, the political commissar of the Lerin Region Partisan detachment “Vicho”. In his speech he emphasized the importance

of the help offered by the Partisans from Vardar Macedonia against the disarming of the counter-bands in Lerin and Kostur Regions.

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943 the detachment “Dame Gruev” broke away from the detachments “Vicho” and “Gotse Delchev” and crossed over the border into Vardar Prespa. The “Vicho” and “Gotse Delchev” detachments, commanded by Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, continued with their mission in disarming the counter-bands with much success. Without resistance the counter-bands surrendered their arms and joined on mass the Partisans and the peoples’ freedom movement.

Around July 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 1943, after a twenty day mission in the Lerin and Kostur Regions, the “Gotse Delchev” detachment also crossed over into Vardar Macedonia.

The military and material aid provided by the Macedonian Partisans and the common military actions between Aegean and Vardar detachments, in spite of all Greek Communist Party obstacles, were of great importance in the awakening of the freedom movement in Aegean Macedonia.

Here is what Andreas Dzimas, member of the Central Committee of the Greek Communist Party and commissar of the main headquarters of the Greek National Liberation Army of Greece, had to say: “Under great pressure from the mass movement in Aegean Macedonia the politburo and the Central Committee of the Greek Communist Party agreed to suspend the Lebanon Agreement and immediately began to orientate themselves towards Yugoslavia’s People’s Liberation Army.

...one of the contributing factors that drew the Macedonians in the war against the occupiers, besides the connections they had with the Greek democratic movement, was the strong influence of the Macedonian Partisans of Yugoslav Macedonia. Their presence in Lerin, Kostur and Voden regions broke the last vestiges of the counter-bands and stirred the Macedonian peoples’ spirits into action against the occupiers...”

On July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944 a conference was held in the village Belkamen, Lerin Region which was attended by the Partisans active on Vicho and Western Kajmakchalan. One of the resolutions reached was the re-organization of the Partisan forces into three detachments. The first lead by Aetos was assigned to operate in Vicho, the second lead by Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was assigned to Bigla – Koreshtata and the third was ordered to go to Western Kajmakchalan. In August 1943 Hristo Kolentsev was appointed detachment commissar for Vicho, replacing Commissar Naum Shupurkovski – Leon who left for a new assignment.

In September 1943, with orders from the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment of the National Liberation Army of Greece (NLAG), Ilija Dimovski – Gotse’s detachment was transferred to Gramos where it remained until December of the same year when it was again ordered to return to Vicho to help put down enemy activities in that region.

In the beginning of April 1944, during the course of operation against the Germans in the territory of Vicho, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse's detachment was dispatched to Gramos.

In May 1944 a large group of Macedonian fighters and activists, lead by Naum Pejov, separated themselves from NLAG in a symbolic protest against the Macedonian Peoples' Liberation Front reforms imposed by the Greek leadership. Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was suspended from duty because he was in support of the separation.

On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 in the village Pozdivishcha, Kostur Region, the Lerin-Kostur Macedonian Battalion was formed. This was due to the persistent demands from the Macedonian people in Aegean Macedonia to have their own army and their need to have more involvement in NLAG matters.

There were many preliminary and significant conditions imposed on the formation of the Battalion but they did not last long.

It was common knowledge that the Greek resistance leadership signed an agreement on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944 in Lebanon to form a coalition government with other civilian parties from Greece which was unwelcome news to the Macedonian resistance movement prompting a revolt.

The agreement was viewed with suspicion. Much of its content was insulting and demeaning to the Macedonian people. The agreement called for the disarmament of the Macedonians which (by the Macedonian people) was interpreted as a means to destroy the Macedonian People's Liberation Front and its armed wing the Macedonian Liberation Army in Lerin and Kostur.

The situation in Kostur Region became even more electrified by the attitude of Andonis Andonopoulos – Periklis, secretary of the regional committee of the Communist Party of Greece, during a party meeting in the village Dmbeni when he said: "The Macedonians as a minority will live in socialism, in northern Greece". In other words, he was promoting the status quo under a Socialist system unacceptable to the Macedonians. A Macedonian present at that meeting challenged the secretary and said: "We Macedonians want our national freedom and we can get it without quarrel, force or war from Berlin..."

To counter the repressive measures taken by the Communist Party of Greece to suffocate the Macedonian resistance, Macedonians, as a symbol of protest separated themselves from the ranks of NLAG and left for Karaorman where they joined the ranks of the Peoples' Liberation Army in Vardar Macedonia.

This Macedonian mistrust against the Greek Communist Party manifested itself in significantly lowering the induction of Macedonian volunteers in the ranks of NLAG and Greek political organizations. It also prompted many Macedonians already serving to desert. Ilija Dimovski –

Gotse at that time was in Gramos, suspended from duty and very much disappointed in what was happening.

In Greece, particularly in Aegean Macedonia, a mass movement was forming in protest against the Lebanon Agreement. Under pressure from the people, the central committee and leadership of the Greek Communist Party took measures to defuse the situation by canceling the agreement and re-orienting itself towards the Macedonian Liberation Army in Yugoslavia.

Opting out of the Lebanon agreement was an indication that the Greek Communist leadership was ready to accept revolutionary ideals and tactics in dealing with the enemy. In this endeavour the Greek party leadership turned its attention to forming a meaningful and trusting relationship with the Macedonians. This however was done in order to engage the Macedonians in the Greek struggle and to fulfill Greek demands.

As a result of the new relationship between NLAG and the National Liberation Army of Macedonia, among other things, the Kostur Region Battalion at Karaorman was ordered to return to Kostur and continue its activities in its mobilization of new recruits from the ranks of the Macedonians and to form new Macedonian detachments, battalions and brigades commanded by Macedonians under the leadership of NLAG.

As was decided and agreed upon, the all Macedonian Kostur Region Battalion in the last ten days of July returned to Korestata and on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 it arrived at the village Pozdivishcha where its formation was formalized.

The task of forming the Macedonian unit and commanding nine NLAG divisions was entrusted to Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, who at that time was in Gramos fighting the largest German offensive against NLAG in northern Pindos in 1944.

On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 Ilija Dimovski – Gotse along with 30 Macedonian fighters arrived in Pozdivishcha and took command of the battalion as ordered.

Afraid that the Macedonian Liberation Movement would develop its own capabilities, and perhaps slip out of its control, the Greek Communist Party leadership decided to prevent it by applying rigorous measures.

August 2<sup>nd</sup>, the day of the Ilinden Uprising, a significant day for the Macedonian people, was chosen to announce the creation of a Macedonian unit, an all Macedonian unit with all Macedonian national characteristics.

On the occasion of the anniversary of the Ilinden Uprising, a meeting was held on August 2<sup>nd</sup> in the village Pozdivishcha where according to the agenda discussions between the National Liberation Army of Greece's representative Renos Mihaleas and the representative of Vardar Macedonia Petre Bogdanov – Kochko took place. Among the many who attended and who spoke was Naum Pejov, the representative of Karaorman who the

NLAG representative pressured to publicly admit that he was in error when he gave his support for the Macedonian separation from NLAG.

According to a Greek Party document here is what was said: “Renos sought to convince Kochko and Pejov, especially Pejov, to admit to having made an error but Pejov refused and spoke against the Greek Communist party reaffirming his position for the need for self-government and the reunification of the Macedonian people.” Under this kind of pressure or for some other reason Renos replied: “You are entitled to Macedonia up to Solun. We will take the Dodecanese and Cyprus. Form your own brigade, division and your Macedonian army. Appoint Ilija Dimovski – Gotse commander of the division...”

In another similar party document it says that during the gathering Lambro Pejov also spoke and was very critical of the National Liberation Front’s (NLF)-NLAG politics and asked that Lazo Damovski – Oshenski be released from prison, who at the time was locked-up by NLAG being accused for participating in the above mentioned Macedonian separation.

According to statements made by Renos Mihaleos the representative of 9 NLAG divisions, it was possible to form a Macedonian brigade depending on the number of available fighters. Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, organized four Cheti (bands) from available fighters from the unit that returned from Karaorman, the fighters he acquired from Gramos, other fighters who joined the Karaorman unit after its return, and from the inflow of new recruits which would have constituted the new battalions. Unfortunately the NLAG leadership would not allow it. The unit which was proposed to be formed, owing to the number of fighters, constituted the Lerinsko-Kosturski Macedonian battalion named “Gotse” after its commander Ilija Dimovski – Gotse.

Prior to the objections it was recommended that Ilija Dimovski – Gotse take command of the battalion and Hristo Kolentsev be made commissar. Afterwards everything changed. On September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1944 under orders from the NLAG regiment 28, Kozmas Spatos – Amintas, a Greek of Albanian descent, was appointed commander of the battalion, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was reduced to captain and Hristo Kolentsev was reduced to party secretary of the battalion.

Orders, commands, reports and other communications in the battalion were carried out in the Macedonian language. A few days after the Battalion’s formation, Renos Mihaleos contacted Ilija Dimovski – Gotse and informed him that an NLF non communist officer from the NLAG regiment 28 was going to be paying him a visit to do an inspection. Renos told Ilija that all communications in the battalion must be done in the Greek language. Perturbed by such a request Ilija replied: “We are not all communists here either. We are patriotic Macedonians and like you and the NLF who are fighting for your national rights, we too are fighting for ours and for our freedom.”

Immediately after the “Gotse” and the “Vodenski” battalions were formed a massive number of Macedonians began to join the ranks of the Partisans. With these numbers it was possible to not only form brigades but divisions. When the Gotse battalion was formed it had 400 fighters and about a month later (September 16) it was numbering 650 and by October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the number jumped to 1,500. This was unprecedented for the resistance movement in Greece especially since the Greek Communist Party entered into the unfavorable Lebanon agreement with its enemies, the Royalists and Republicans.

For the sake of national unity a “right wing” government was appointed to lead Greece under the leadership of Georgios Papandreou’s “right wing” Greek government unfortunately did not recognize the existence of the Macedonian people in Greece. If a government did not recognize the existence of Macedonian people then how was it going to tolerate armed Macedonian units, Macedonian soldiers and Macedonian institutions? The Greek communist party leadership, in order to please the government, began to suppress the gains Macedonians had made and took rigorous measures to prevent the Macedonian Liberation Movement from expanding and from slipping out of its control.

One of the measures undertaken was to stop Macedonians from joining the ranks of the Partisans. In a communiqué to the Central committee of the Macedonian Bureau on September 12, 1944 the Greek Communist Party, among other things, said: “Let it be noted that our side reckons it’s time to stop recruiting fighters from the ranks of the Slavo-Macedonians”.

The commissar of the Greek division of the National Liberation Army of Greece for Macedonia, Markos Vafiadis prohibited the Macedonian battalions from inducting new recruits, with aims of ultimately disbanding them.

Decisions made by the Greek party leadership to stop the recruitment of Macedonian fighters into the Macedonian battalions were ignored by the Macedonian leadership. The Macedonian battalions continued to induct volunteer Macedonian recruits into their ranks even though the commissar of the Greek division of the National Liberation Army of Greece (NLAG) for Macedonia, Markos Vafiadis sent them further orders by telegraph to cease the recruitment.

NLAG’s immediate placement under the command of Georgios Papandreou’s government, in accordance with the September 26, 1944 Kazerta agreement, brought into the forefront the question as to what to do with the Macedonian battalions. The rightist government as a direct commander of NLAG did not want to allow the continuation of the Macedonian units because their existence provided undeniable proof that a Macedonian population existed in Greece.

The NLAG leadership with aims at keeping good relations with the government, towards the end of September 1944, brought a resolution to disband the Macedonian battalions.

Faced with a grave situation the Lerin-Kostur Macedonian Battalion command decided to ignore the Greek commissar's orders and as a first preventative measure took action to dismiss the battalion's Greek commandant Kozmas Spanos – Amintas and replaced him with a trusted Macedonian, Atanas Koroveshov. Command of the battalion was relegated to Ilija Dimovski – Gotse.

In addition to that, Naum Pejov was dispatched to Vardar Macedonia to inform the leadership there of the impending situation and to obtain its opinion. Atanas Koroveshov was also sent to follow up.

According to Naum Pejov the attitude of the main headquarters of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) of Macedonia was: "It is improper to attempt to disband the Macedonian battalion in Greece by the Greek side. Every attempt must be made at any cost to maintain the battalion intact. Not only to remain intact but also to continue its mobilization program with new fighters. In case it is attacked by the Greek side, it was recommended that the battalion move north and eventually cross into Yugoslavian territory where it could continue to campaign against the German occupier."

It quickly became apparent to the Greek leadership that the Macedonians were not going to comply with their directives so in the beginning of October they ordered the Lerin-Kostur battalion to head south to Sjatista, Kozheni Region, where the Greeks figured it would be easier to disarm and disband. However, the Macedonian commandant and battalion leadership were well aware of the Greek plans and after again disobeying orders, took defensive countermeasures and regrouped their forces.

Grogorios Konatos, the Greek commandant of the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment of NLAG sent another order to Ilija Dimovski – Gotse demanding that he comply with NLAG's first order. That order too was disobeyed by the Macedonian leadership. During this critical moment Hristo Kolentsev, the Macedonian battalion commissar left the battalion in order to make himself available to the leadership of NLAG in the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment. In the village Turje, Lerin Region, where the battalion's command was stationed, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse and Kolentsev exchanged a few sharp words. Kolentsev was of the opinion that the battalion had taken a wrong path and that it belonged with the NLAG which was in total disagreement with Ilija Dimovski – Gotse's insistence that it remain separate.

Attempts to bring the Macedonians to obedience and to gain Ilija Dimovski – Gotse's support were also made by Drosos Zaharias, the Greek commissar of the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment of NLAG. In a letter to Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, Zaharias suggested that he "obey" the voice of the party and return to the ranks of NLAG. Among other things, Ilija

Dimovski – Gotse responded as follows: “I received your letter. I am consciously concerned that we are wasting time on this while the Germans in Lerin are murdering and killing our people. That is precisely why we are not satisfied in our current position and have decided to fight our enemies everywhere and with the best of our abilities. I myself as Ilija Dimovski Gotse without the 1,500 fighters am nothing. By myself I am worthless.

You are saying that you will attack and destroy us. That would be a big mistake and a tragedy for both of our people, for the Greeks and for the Macedonians and that will greatly damage us all. If you agree with the principles of the party then show some concern for our needs as Macedonians, which I believe are not anti-Marxist and are not at all outside of the common interests of both of our peoples. When you do that then I will ask my 1,500 Partisans to prepare to give their lives for the freedom of the Greeks and Macedonians.”

The last Greek leadership attempt to bring the Macedonians to obedience was during a meeting between Stavros Gusiadis, the Commissar of the 9<sup>th</sup> NLAG division, Renos Mihaleas and the Macedonian political and military leadership. The meeting was held on October 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944. All the Macedonian leaders were united and in agreement that what was happening and the situation they were in was entirely the responsibility of the Greek leadership. Nothing was finalized during the meeting, which lasted the entire night.

After that, on October 7, 1944, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse instructed the NLAG 28<sup>th</sup> regiment command, to which the Macedonian battalion belonged, that the battalion would not obey its orders to disband. Furthermore he informed the Greek regiment that the Macedonian battalion had made plans and established connections with the political and military leadership of Vardar Macedonia. With those words all connections to NLAG were broken.

From the time all attempts failed, including measures of maneuvering, threats, ideological and other pressures to achieve their aims, to disband the battalion the Greek resistance leadership undertook the last and most unpopular and controversial measure. Namely, the commandant of the 9<sup>th</sup> division of NLAG, General Kalabalikis, in agreement with the command of the group of divisions of NLAG from Macedonia and the General Headquarters of NLAG, ordered its own units to pursue the Lerin-Kostur Region Macedonian battalion at lightning speed and destroy it. For this operation the 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> NLAG regiments, NLAG reserves and the National militias from Lerin and Kostur Regions were engaged.

Faced with this situation the battalion on October 7, 1944 left for Prespa, Lerin Region with aims to avoid bloodshed and on October 12, 1944 crossed over the border and entered the Yugoslav sector of Prespa.

The deed of splitting the Lerin-Kostur Region battalion from NLAG was viewed by the leadership of the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> regiments and by the

Greek political organizations and parties as counter revolutionary. The battalion's Macedonian command which had made its decision to split gave its reasons for the splitting on October 15, 1944.

The reasons for splitting the Lerin-Kostur Region Macedonian battalion from NLAG were best said in the November 29, 1944 letter from the Aegean Macedonian political and military leadership sent to the Macedonian bureau of the Greek Communist Party. In the letter, among other things, was said: "It would be a misunderstanding for you to believe that this is the work of one personal drive, one incident with clear subjective impulses... We are of one idea, one desire, and one expression of one people from a one suffering filled country, which from the ashes of hundreds of years of slavery wants to be reborn. Our struggle is clear; National freedom for our people. Open wide the horizon of the democratic process and let the national unification of our people take its place...

We here as a people of indigenous birth by one historical need are and will remain to the end a consistent and resolved national force of the Macedonian people, an expressive and bold democratic force, a lasting political process of the people as a whole which will protect its vitality and moral character and to the end will fight by all means of struggle for the national movement of the Macedonian people and its national restoration..."

The Greek party leadership, however, gave a different interpretation for the reasons why it wanted to disband the Macedonian battalions. Markos Vafiadis, for example, stated that the order for disbanding the Lerin-Kostur Region battalion was given by himself personally and not because of pressure from Papandreou. He gave the order because Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, was allegedly working for and was materially helped by Captain Evans, member of the British War Mission in Vicho, who had aims at taking Solun, something which would have provoked internal and international implications and would have caused damage to the NLAG and to its neighbours. Markos Vafiadis also stated: "The negative expressions of the Lebanon Agreement became a factor of discontent among the Slavo-Macedonians. Those Slavo-Macedonian elements which harbored negative feelings were welcomed by the English who had in mind chauvinistic inclinations in the affairs of the Slavo-Macedonians and would not have hesitated to turn the Slavo-Macedonian units against the NLAG units in the Vicho vicinity."

The Greek resistance leadership deduced that the Macedonians were getting ready to assume a war campaign in Aegean Macedonia based on the information it received from Hristo Kolentsev – Kokinos, the Lerin-Kostur Region Macedonian battalion political commissar.

In a document Kolentsev, among other things, informed the Greek leadership that Naum Pejov and Atanas Koroveshov, around the end of September 1944, visited Vardar Macedonia in order to familiarize the

Macedonian political and military leadership there with NLAG's attitude towards the Macedonians and to update them with the military and political situation in Greece. According to Kolentsev, Pejov and Koroveshov received the following directives from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vardar Macedonia and the General Headquarters of the National Liberation Army of Macedonia: "To obtain approval from the Greek leadership in order to form a Macedonian army with its own headquarters. If the Greek Communist Party did not approve, the Macedonians were instructed to conduct their own massive mobilization and afterwards cross over to Ljubojno, Prespa Region in Vardar Macedonia where arms would be secured for the new recruits. They were also told that waiting in Ljubojno would be two Macedonian National Liberation Army brigades under the command of 'the bat' who would lead them into Kostur, Lerin and Voden Regions in Aegean Macedonia and afterwards to any other place where there would still be Germans remaining."

The above, stated by Naum Shupurkovski - Leon, the commissar of the Lerin Region Partisan detachment "Vicho" and of the Lerin-Kostur Region brigade, was delivered to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Greek Communist Party.

Naum Shupurkovski – Leon, who until the beginning of October 1944 followed the Greek Communist Party line, in the above document confirmed that the above mentioned directives, coming from the Central Committee of the Vardar Macedonian Communist Party and of the General Headquarters of Macedonia, were accurate and he was convinced of it by Naum Pejov, Atanas Koroveshov and by Anesti Panovski, an activist from Bitola, who had come to Greek occupied Macedonia for that purpose.

The Lerin-Kostur Region Macedonian battalion and the new recruits were not armed in Ljubojno as expected and did not return to Aegean Macedonia to pursue the Germans, but crossed over into Bitola Region, where they were engaged in campaigns against the occupier. The original plan was hampered owing to the Churchill – Stalin agreement of October 1944, which placed Greece as a whole under British influence.

As mentioned earlier, between October 12 and 13, 1944 the Lerin-Kostur Region Macedonian battalion left the territory of Aegean Macedonia and crossed the border into the Prespa sector of Vardar Macedonia.

On its way to cross the border more Macedonian activists and local residents of that region joined the battalion bringing its numbers to over 1,500.

On October 13, 1944 as soon as the Macedonian battalion entered Yugoslav territory, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, by way of a letter, informed

Marshal Tito that the Lerin-Kostur Region battalion had splintered from NLAG and was now in Vardar Macedonia.

On October 16, 1944 the Lerin-Kostur battalion left Prespa and relocated to the village Graeshnitsa at the base of operations.

On October 22, 1944 in the village Dragosh, Bitola Region the battalion, in the presence of Dime Bojanovski – Dize the General Headquarters representative of the People's Liberation Army of Vardar Macedonia, was reorganized into a brigade called the Lerin-Kostur Region Macedonian brigade (LKRMB). Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was given command of the brigade and Naum Shupurkovski – Leon was appointed as its political commissar.

After the brigade's formation, the brigade's command presented a document to the General Headquarters of the People's Liberation Army of Vardar Macedonia outlining the Macedonian people's struggle in Aegean Macedonia, the Greek attitude and mistakes made towards the Macedonian People's national question, etc., which explained the overall situation in Greece and the battalion's decision and motives for leaving Greece.

In the village Graeshnitsa, where the seat of command was situated, the brigade conducted exercises to prepare for operations at the roads and highways connecting Lerin and Bitola to Solun.

The commandant and commissar of LKRMB, Ilija Dimovski – Goce and Naum Shupurkovski – Leon, through their new orders, which they received towards the end of October, 1944 from the political leadership of Macedonia, wrote a letter addressed to the Communist Party of Greece in which they requested from the Greek Party leadership to allow the formation of a Macedonian army with its own Macedonian headquarters, in which there would also be a representative of NLAG, to allow the formation of a Macedonian organization – a Macedonian Aegean National Liberation Front (MANLF) with a representative from the Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF) as well as to allow a Macedonian representative in the GNLF. The Macedonian right to self-determination was to be propagated through the press and the right to unification to be propagated only by word of mouth. Unfortunately these requests were rejected by the Greek Communist Party, qualifying them as provocative, unfriendly and nationalistic demands.

On November 4, 1944 the LKRMB took part in the liberation of Bitola and on November 18, 1944 it added its first all Aegean shock brigade consisting of fighters from the Voden and Lerin-Kostur Region Macedonian battalions, which separated from NLAG in October 1944 and from the detachment of the "Gotse Delchev" brigade.

The brigade's commanders at the time of its formation consisted of Ilija Dimovski – Gotse as its commandant, Naum Pejov as its second commandant, Mohailo Keramitzhiev as its commissar, Vangel Ajanovski -Oche as its second commissar and Steve Georgiev - Dimov as its chief.

During the initiation ceremonies Lazo Kalajdzhiski – Dobri, the commandant of the Bitola Region Military District, surrendered the flag for his brigade to Ilija Dimovski – Gotse and among other things said: “I surrender this flag to you from the Ilinden Uprising and trust that forever you will guard it until the ultimate liberation of all of Macedonia”. Upon receiving the flag Ilija Dimovski – Gotse replied: “We accept this flag and we will protect it to the last drop of our blood”.

The first military assignment given to the first all Aegean Shock Brigade was to clean up the Balisti bands in the village Ostrets, Bitola Region, which it did in the first ten days of December 1944.

On December 3, 1944 Great Britain began its military intervention against NLAG in Athens. Given the situation the fighters and officers of the Macedonian brigade in the Republic of Macedonia could not remain indifferent about what was happening in Greece, being aware that defeat of the democratic forces in Greece would worsen the situation of the Macedonian people. They were all in agreement that there was a need to explore all means to help NLAG, which meant first hand involvement of the brigade in the conflict. At this point the Aegean Macedonian leadership contemplated around this question searching for conditions under which to become involved. Naum Shupurkovski, a member of the Secretariat of the Macedonian Political Commission under Greece, in his report addressed to the Political Bureau of the Greek Communist Party commented that on December 3, 1944 on the day of the formation of the Political Commission, at a meeting attended by Mohailo Keramidchiev, Naum Pejov, Paskal Mitrevski, Dimitar Vlahov, Petse Trajkov and himself, Lazar Kolishevski addressed the preoccupied Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia, according to Naum Shupurkovski – Leon, as follows: “Leave immediately for down there (Aegean Macedonia). Get agreement from the Greek Communist Party and fight like democrats under its leadership without pretensions...” Several days later, Liljana Chalovska, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece in the accommodations of the Political Commission of the Macedonians under Greece, in Bitola, addressed Paskal Mitrevski, Naum Pejov, Mohailo Keramidchiev and Naum Shupurkovski – Leon and among other things told them the following: “You need not wait to be pacified by the parties. Take your own initiative and go down there without asking for anything from the Communist Party of Greece. As long as you stay here you tolerate liability. Down there (Greece) it is not only Greece’s and Macedonia’s fate that is decided, but that of all the Balkan nations...”

Four or five days later a joint meeting was held between the brigade’s headquarters and the political committee to discuss the circumstances under which it would be appropriate for the brigade and all the Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia who were presently in Yugoslavia to return to Greece and to engage in the struggle on the side of NLAG and

how to communicate these circumstances to the Communist Party of Greece. Naum Pejov, Lazo Poplazarov, Paskal Mitrevski and Mohailo Keramitdzhev, keeping in mind what had happened in the past, insisted on going to Greece as a distinct people; they insisted that the brigade should have its own headquarters, its own flag with the five ray star and be recognized by Greece as a Macedonian army. Contrary to that, Naum Shupurkovski – Leon figured that such conditions were not necessary. Paskal Mitrevski intervened and insisted on having the political committee situated inside the city of Lerin.

On December 14, 1944 Andreas Dzhimas, the representative of the Communist Party of Greece and NLAG in Yugoslavia, came to Bitola and asked for the brigade to be disbanded and its fighters to enlist in the NLAG units, or at least to surrender its arms to NLAG. The Aegean leadership did not agree with this recommendation. To solve the problem Andeas Dzhimas, Naum Pejov and Paskal Mitrevski went to Skopje to discuss the situation with the Vardar Macedonian leadership. In the meantime orders came from Tito prohibiting the brigade from going to Greece because the brigade was part of the Yugoslav army. Anyhow immediate events confirmed that one more brigade could not have saved the democratic national front of Greece.

On January 2, 1945 the brigade received orders from the General Headquarters of the Macedonian-Vardar National Liberation Front to go to Tetovo and eliminate the remnants of the Balisti bands that were active in the Gostivar and Tetovo Regions.

After about two months of campaigning in the Gostivar and Tetovo Regions (January-February 1945) the brigade completed its assigned task.

Then in the beginning of March 1945 the brigade was relocated to Skopje with orders from the General Headquarters to again relocate to Bitola and Gevgelija.

As it is well known NLAG was defeated in Greece and a far rightist government came to power, which in order to secure its own position introduced a massive terror campaign against the resistance movement, especially against the Macedonians. Part of the terror was the slanderous campaign waged by the domestic and foreign reactionaries against the Macedonians and against Greece's neighbours, particularly against Yugoslavia for its alleged interference in Greece's internal affairs and for its alleged territorial aspirations against Greece.

Given how events unfolded in Greece and in Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia there was no longer a need to keep the first Aegean shock brigade active. By order number G 236 from the General Headquarters and from the Partisan Detachment of Macedonia the brigade was disbanded on April 2, 1945.

A little while later Ilija Dimovski – Gotse by his own request was demobilized from the Yugoslav army and joined the national liberation

movement in Aegean Macedonia led by the Aegean Macedonian National Liberation Front.

The brigade and its commander Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, in the eyes of the Macedonian people in Aegean Macedonia, were legends. People counted on them that at the direst moments they would come and save them. The following letter dated June 1, 1945 from a group of Macedonian prisoners jailed in the “Pavlos Melas” jail in Solun, addressed to Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, well illustrates the situation:

“City of Solun, 1.6.45

To the commander of the First Aegean Brigade, Bitola,

From all the Macedonians locked-up in the “Pavlos Melas” prison, dear commander, please know that there are 400 of us locked away in this jail and many more in other similar jails. The Greeks have accused us of being “autonomists” but please know, dear commander that all of us found in this prison are well organized and ready to escape to the mountains and together with you are committed to fight against the occupier and to free our people. We have had enough of being enslaved and that is why we ask from you to let us know what to do...”

Another similar letter was sent to Ilija Dimovski – Gotse on January 1, 1945, this one from the Macedonians locked up in the “Edi Kule” prison in Solun declaring their readiness to join him and his brigade.

Ilija Dimovski – Gotse’s popularity with the ordinary Macedonian people was a big problem for the leadership of the Communist Party of Greece with respect to their party’s own policies towards the Macedonian national question. That is why a smear campaign was initiated against Ilija Dimovski – Gotse led by the regional committees of the Greek Communist Party and involving members of the highest level of the Party’s leadership. For example Nikos Zahariadis, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece, during the December 26 and 27, 1945 plenum, severely criticized Ilija Dimovski – Gotse by referring to him as a separatist, autonomist and a collaborator of the English. Not to be outdone Leonidas Stringos, the secretary of the provincial committee of the Communist Party of Greece for Macedonia, also used similar words when he referred to Ilija Dimovski – Gotse. Solon Grigoriadis in his article published in the Greek Communist Party newspaper “Rizospastis” portrayed Ilija Dimovski – Gotse as an autonomist and a careerist.

As it is well known, on April 23, 1945 outside and independent of the Communist Party of Greece, the organization “Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front” was formed with the task of organizing and

leading the Macedonian people's struggle against the Royalist and Republican terror and winning national rights and freedoms by using all means and forms of struggle.

The Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front, distinct from the Communist Party of Greece, worked for a peaceful resolution.

On account of the significant military and political factor in the country there was a pressing need to combine the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front with the Greek democratic forces. To work out the details a meeting between Nikos Zahariadis and Paskal Mitrevski was held in Solun in May 1946 during which a decision was made to unify the two democratic forces under the leadership of the Greek Communist Party. Among other things they agreed to preserve the Macedonian Partisan formations as separate entities, which represented the first step and condition for the creation of a separate Macedonian army with its own headquarters to be jointly established in every region of Aegean Macedonia.

In the beginning of July 1946 the regional committees of the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front held a meeting during which it was agreed that every regional committee was to donate 100 to 150 Macedonian Partisans to form Macedonian units and to work for the unification with the Communist Party of Greece. With that decision the first unit was formed on July 26, 1946 at Mount Vicho. Then in the beginning of September 1946 Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was given responsibility for organizing and leading the Macedonian Partisan units in Lerin and Kostur Regions. However, Athanasios Zhoras and Theodoros Eftimiadis, from the leadership of the Communist Party of Greece for Lerin and Kostur regions, reacted strongly to Ilija Dimovski – Gotse's presence in Aegean Macedonia. Besides requesting that Ilija Dimovski-Gotse be removed as leader they began a slandering propaganda campaign calling him an autonomist and a nationalist.

It was under these circumstances that Paskal Mitrevski, forced by the Greek leadership, had Ilija Dimovski – Gotse removed from his leadership role and advised him to leave Greece altogether. This, according to the Greek leadership, was done for some higher purpose but it was well known that Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was removed and exiled for the sole purpose of isolating him from his own people. He was deliberately stripped of his right to be with his people, fight alongside them, fight for them and share their fate.

In November 1946 Ilija Dimovski – Gotse was compelled to leave his fighters and go to Skopje, an act with which he could not be at peace. He could not accept the idea of being far away and outside the tragic and bloody events that were unfolding in his part of Macedonia. He could not accept his fate of being far away from the bloody battles in which his Macedonian people were engaged. Finally in May 1947 Ilija Dimovski –

Gotse decided to contact Zahariadis himself by letter and appealed to him to allow him to return to his people, to share his fate with them and to fight as a common soldier. Because of the influence and authority that Ilija Dimovski – Gotse had with the Macedonian fighters and people, his appeal was granted and again he found himself in the middle of the struggle. He was given a post as commander of one of the NLAG battalions.

Well aware of the negative effects the Macedonian liberation movement would experience under Greek control, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, during the first Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front congress, held in January 1948, strongly opposed the actions of the Communist Party of Greece and their attempts to remove some of the old Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front leadership and replace it with their own people. Because of his brave stance the Macedonian leadership asked Ilija Dimovski – Gotse to become a member of Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front's main council, which he accepted.

His behaviour during the congress however was solid proof for the Communist Party of Greece that he would become a problem and an obstacle to their Party's politics, so in March 1948 he was again demobilized from NLAG.

The Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front founders, among whom was Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, well understood that the Communist Party of Greece replaced him and others like him because it did not want to lose control of the powerful Macedonian movement.

With the infiltration of its own people into the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front, the Communist Party of Greece strengthened its influence over the Macedonian people and opened the way for a total takeover.

The leadership of the Communist Party of Greece, with aims to completely eliminate the old Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front leadership, in the beginning of April, 1949 under an urgent order from the General Headquarters of DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) immobilized the entire professional cadres and all other leaders of the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation. And as we now know this had very negative consequences on a political, organizational and military level.

In order to remove the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front leaders from the spotlight in Aegean Macedonia, Zahariadis sent them to Yugoslavia. Mohailo Keramidchiev, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse and Vangel Ajanovski – Oche were sent to the Republic of Macedonia to recruit new fighters for DAG from the Macedonian immigrants who had fled there earlier. But as the leaders left they were never allowed to return.

The main objective of the Communist Party of Greece leadership in exiling the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front cadres to the Republic of Macedonia was to decapitate and disorientate the Macedonian

National Liberation Movement. These cadres who performed high political functions and had many years of revolutionary experience were not only dismissed from their posts but were intentionally labeled deserters, as if they left voluntarily, which reflected badly on the entire Macedonian population. Macedonian activist Micho Velakov, lieutenant-colonel of DAG, in his letter of November 26, 1948 addressed to the political commissar of DAG's General Headquarters, in relation to the above among other things wrote: "Most Macedonian cadres are now subservient in DAG. For example, Lazo Poplazarov and others who have distinguished themselves as leaders in the struggle, are made into common fighters whereas the Greek cadres from Bulkes, Vojvodina, are immediately given responsible positions as quartermasters to the political commissars in the brigades, responsible for the security of the battalions, from whom several have deserted. Naturally the above doings have a distinctly 'opposite effect' with respect to the high functions that were given to me and Todor Gluvchev which in the eyes of the more senior cadres of the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front, discredits us, given that we have less experience than them yet we occupy higher position..."

The Communist Party of Greece in its attempt to completely eradicate the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front, during a plenum held on August 8, 1948, dismissed Mohailo Keramidchiev, president and Paskal Mitrevski, secretary of the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front, and replaced them with its own "trusted people".

Miltiadis Porfirogenis, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece, in his discussions strongly attacked Ilija Dimovski – Gotse commenting that: "Gotse remains at the same position as the reactionaries who say Macedonia is Greco-sized."

With aims at removing the entire old Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front leadership from the limelight of Aegean Macedonia, Zahariadis made the following very clever move. On September 24, 1948 he held a conference with the Macedonian cadres in DAG at Vicho with whom, among other things, he discussed the problems of lack of strategic manpower reserves in DAG. A source to solving this problem, he pointed out, was the political émigrés who had earlier fled to Yugoslavia.

During the same conference it was decided that Mohailo Keramidchiev, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse and Vangel Ajanovski go to Yugoslavia and recruit fighters from the ranks of the Macedonian émigrés as was suggested. With these recruits Zahariadis "promised" he would form separate Macedonian units within DAG.

Ilija Dimovski – Gotse and the others, believing that there truly and finally would be a Macedonian army created, left home with great enthusiasm. Little did they know that this was yet another big Greek lie and they would never be allowed to return.

On September 25 and on October 3, 1948 the secretariat of the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front introduced a resolution accepting the recommendations made at the conference.

Immediately after receiving confirmation from the Yugoslav authorities to go ahead and recruit, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, Mohailo Keramidchiev and Vangel Ajanovski – Oche began the recruitment process with much success. In a very short time they were able to get commitment from more than 300 Macedonian men and women, a number which could have become realistically larger with time. Unfortunately their efforts were made difficult and eventually diminished because DAG was not performing as well as expected and there was doubt among the Macedonians that it would be capable of winning the war.

Even though the leadership of the Communist Party of Greece explained that it would remain outside of the problems, which it interpreted as being experienced between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the Inform-bureau, it very quickly changed its attitude and actively began an anti-Yugoslavian propaganda campaign.

To overcome the problems, in February 1949, under the initiative of the Yugoslav leadership a delegation from the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front and from the Communist Party of Greece, lead by Miltiadis Porfirogenis a member of the Communist Party of Greece's Central Committee, was sent to Skopje and had discussions with Lazar Koloshevski and Tsvetko Uzunovski – Abas.

The first meeting was held on February 8, 1949 where Porfirogenos outlined his questions which his leadership wanted to discuss with the Communist Party of Vardar Macedonia.

On behalf of the Communist Party of Greece Porfirogenos requested from the Yugoslav authorities to allow his party to mobilize the entire adult Macedonian émigré population in Yugoslavia for the war effort and to return the rest of the refugees to Greece.

It is understandable why such demands and requests were unacceptable and could not be granted by the Communist Party of Vardar Macedonia, therefore the meetings were unsuccessful.

In spite of his trashy and slanderous talk about Mohailo Keramidchiev, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, Vangel Ajanovski - Oche, and Stefana Vangelova – Slavianka, Porfirogenis, on February 9, 1949, decided to hold another meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to involve himself in the mobilization program.

During the meeting, after Krsto Mangov a member of the visiting committee spoke, Ilija Dimovski – Gotse took the stand and informed the committee that he, Keramidchiev, Oche and Slavianka had come to Yugoslavia under direct orders from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece to recruit new fighters for DAG. “To complete that task”, continued Gotse, “conferences were organized in which DAG’s

needs were publicized and the importance of creating ‘all Macedonian Partisan units’ was emphasized. It was stressed that this need would serve the Macedonian people militarily in the combined struggle with the Greek people.”

“As a result of this”, said Gotse, “we recruited 300 Macedonian men and women. Unfortunately, our efforts were not only unsupported, but were sabotaged by representatives of the Greek community in Bulkesh, Vojvodina, and by the representatives of the Communist Party of Greece – DAG in Skopje. As a consequence of all of this”, said Gotse, “many Macedonians, including some leaders of the Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front became suspicious and believed they were lied to by Zahariadis, especially about his decisions and statements made regarding the formation of all Macedonian units. There is enough convincing evidence there to make us believe that the Communist Party of Greece is leading two-faced politics”. As a closing argument Gotse said: “This resulted in urging the refugees and fighters to tell us that in order for them to go and fight down there they would need written guarantees from the democratic leadership of Greece, by which they have been lied to so many times. First and foremost they would require written guarantees that Macedonian units would be formed and would be allowed to exist. And because of these shady politics not only can we not find new recruits, but we can’t even hold the 300 who already gave us their commitment.” Keramidchiev, Oche and Slavianka more or less also said the same thing.

After the meetings in Skopje the leadership of the Communist Party of Greece began an unprecedented smear campaign against the above mentioned Aegean-Macedonian National Liberation Front leaders calling them deserters, traitors, etc. Unfortunately having no other means by which to defend themselves, they decided to answer to the slanderous remarks by writing a letter addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece, in which they addressed each of the accusations.

At the end Keramidchiev and Ilija Dimovski – Gotse, to do one better regarding the conflicting recommendations and in the interest of the liberation movement, put a motion before the leadership of the Communist Party of Greece to satisfy the needs of the Macedonian people with regards to forming their own Macedonian units with their own headquarters in the framework of DAG. This was to be done by a written agreement. If such an agreement was signed Gotse and Keramidchiev promised to deliver not hundreds but thousands of fighters to Greece to continue the struggle.

This letter served Zahariadis well as motive to call on the leadership assets of the Communist Organization of Aegean Macedonia (COAM) on June 20, 1949, which devised the famous resolution under the title: “Resolution of the leadership assets of COAM for the nationalistic traitors Keramidchiev and Gotse”. After that Mohailo Keramidchiev and Ilija

Dimovski – Gotse broke all relations with the Communist Party of Greece and DAG and remained in Yugoslavia.

Ilija Dimovski – Gotse became active in the daily political life in the Republic of Macedonia in various different functions. He died in Skopje on June 26, 1961.

By Risto Kirjazovski (Nova Makedonija), translated from Macedonian to English and edited by Risto Stefov

## **Mirka Ginova (1916-1946) – Fighter and Legend - Aspiring to gain equality for the Macedonian people**

Mirka was the most outstanding Macedonian woman freedom fighter, organizer and leader of the Greek Civil War. She was a teacher and an outstanding fighter for national, political and cultural equality of the Macedonian people. She was the first woman to become a victim of Greek Royalists and Republicans in Greece.

Mirka was born in 1916 in the village Rusilovo, Voden Region. She was not even two years old when she lost her mother to influenza.

After finishing elementary school in Katranitsa she applied to the school of home economics in the city of Voden but was not accepted. Failing that, she enrolled at a similar school in Lerin and was accepted. Later she went to Kostur and graduated as a schoolteacher. Although she enjoyed learning, Mirka's experience in school was not very pleasant.

After graduation and placing numerous applications, Mirka was unable to get a teaching job for the next six years. The reason: she was Macedonian.

Given her revolutionary family background, the Greek authorities found it very dangerous to have her as a teacher in any of the Macedonian speaking villages. Fortunately, just before the start of WW II, Mirka was finally given a teaching job in the village Kutugeri, in Voden region.

Later Mirka found a teaching job in the Macedonian-speaking village Vlkojanevo, in Voden Region. In view of the outbreak of the Greek-Italian War and later the German invasion, she felt compelled to return to her own village and together with her neighbours she joined the underground movement against the occupation.

In the spring of 1943 Mirka joined the newly-formed youth organization National Youth Organization and became a member of its committee. Soon afterwards her talks of patriotism caused her popularity to rise not only among the Macedonian youth but also in the entire general public in Ostrovo region.

During the summer of 1943, Mirka joined the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) and the Greek National Liberation Front (GNLF) then began campaigning against the German-Bulgarian occupation and organized resistance movements in the Macedonian villages in Ostrovo Region.

Around the end of 1943 Mirka came into contact with the Macedonian Partisans, in the now Republic of Macedonia, who during that time were stationed in the mountains Kozhuf and Kajmakchalan.

With the formation of the Voden Macedonian Battalion in the summer of 1944, within the ranks of National Liberation Army of Greece (NLAG) Mirka worked very hard as a recruiter of young Macedonians. She was very patriotic, charismatic and a big influence on the Macedonian people.

As a result of her efforts many joined the Voden Battalion in Kajmakchalan.

During the battle of Muaren-An, at village Ostrovo near Voden, on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944, when the Partisans attacked a German compound filled with troops and munitions, Mirka, with a rifle in hand, was at the forefront fighting the enemy face to face.

After Germany's fall and the capitulation to NLAG, as a result of the Varkiza Agreement, Mirka did not surrender her arms. She went to the Macedonian people and continued the war against the new reactionary Greek government which, with greater fanaticism continued to terrorize and murder the Macedonian population.

In March 1945 Mirka, through Vangel Shamardanov-Ilindenski, came into contact with the leadership of the Secret Macedonian Liberation Organization SMLO the newly formed Macedonian organization in Voden and became a valuable and active member. SMLO was created to defend the Macedonian people against acts of aggression from the Greek Royalists and Republicans and their nationalistic henchmen.

On July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1945 in the Tupchesto Region, between the villages Krontselovo and Vikojanevo near the city of Voden, SMLO held a regional conference. Among other things, the work in progress with regards to SMLO's districts was reviewed and a decision was made to change SMLO's name to Peoples Liberation Front (PLF) for the Voden Region.

During the same conference a new ruling body was elected and sworn in to run the newly formed PLF for Voden Region. The new ruling body members consisted of: Vangel Ajanovski-Oche political secretary, Vangel Shamardanov-Ilindenski organizational secretary, Risto Kordalov in charge of military matters and of the Partisan detachment of PLF; Petre Popov in charge of propaganda and campaigning; Risto Bukavalov, in charge of financial matters; Tashko Hadzhijanev leader of the youth movement and Mirka Ginova in charge of the women's movement.

From this moment on Mirka worked even harder and together with her associates formed two new PLF associated organizations, the Peoples Liberation Youth Alliance (PLYA)) and the Women's Antifascist Front (WAF)) for Voden Region.

Mirka, besides being a devout patriot, was also a charismatic leader and knew how to arouse people's emotions. She quickly became very popular with the youth and with all the Macedonian people with whom she came into contact. In no time she became the most famous fighter in Voden Region.

PLF for Voden Region soon began its actions against the Greek Royalists and Republicans who terrorized the Macedonian population in the region. Its armed wing, remnants of NLAG fighters, first attacked the Royalist gendarmes in the villages Lukovets, Pozharsko and Sarakinovo.

Then they attacked the Greek army watchtowers in Jankulovi kolidi, Kajmakchalan and in the village Gorno Rodivo. They also liquidated a number of traitors who collaborated with the Greek police.

Mirka Ginova, member of the district committee of PLF and secretary of WAF for Voden Region, was by now deeply involved with organizing serious resistance against the Royalists and Republicans and former supporters of the Fascist occupiers. That is why the Greek police and gendarmes pursued her with all their strength.

A series of event started taking place which eventually led to Mirka's demise. The first was on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1946 when two PLF couriers Vangel Goglev-Bezandako and Tashko Bobev, going from the village Vlkojanevo to the village Krontselovo unexpectedly ran into a Greek patrol and had a skirmish. The encounter tipped off the Greek army that there might be a Partisan presence in the region around the village Vlkojanevo.

A little later the same soldiers grabbed a couple of goat herders from Vlkojanevo and under extreme duress forced them to reveal the position of the PLF detachment in the Pochep woodlands. Fortunately the PLF contact Vani Barev from Vlkojanevo got wind of the situation and was able to warn the PLF fighters, avoiding the ambush.

On July 30<sup>th</sup>, Risto Kormanov (commander of the PLF detachment for Voden region) and Captain Adamidis Filotas-Katsonis (commander of the detachment in the Voden region), received orders to go to Mount Karakamen to retrieve arms and ammunition from the warehouse under the command of Captain Hristos Palamas-Mavros.

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1946 Dimitar Limbov, Tashko Sapundzhiev-Kuliman and Vangel Goglev-Bezandako were ordered by Risto Bukovalov-Zhikov to go to Dupen-Most, located between Vladovo and the city of Voden, to liquidate the informants Giorgi Panchev and Giorgi Bapka-Daskalot who were expected to arrive in Voden from the village Vladovo.

Unfortunately they didn't follow orders on the belief that Dimitar Limbov could resolve the situation without killings. Limbov, who was also from the village Vladovo, was confident that he could stop the informants from informing and would in fact convince them to join the Partisans. So the informants were allowed to enter Voden unabated. Unfortunately, Dimitar was very wrong and as future events would show, his mistake would have consequences for the Partisans.

The same day a group of fighters, under Risto Kordalov and Captain Katsonis's command, after finishing their duty on Mount Karakamen, returned to Voden and camped at Kusa and Dolga Livada.

The following day Risto Kordalov wrote a letter to Risto Bukovalov-Zhikov, asking him to take his troops to a pre-designated place. He arrived at base camp around midnight.

Earlier the same day the leaders of PLF, among them, Mirka Ginova, Giorgi Atanasov-Blazhe, Vangel Shamardanov-Ilindenski, Lazo Kamdzhev and others arrived.

The political leaders of CPG, Georgios Mustakides-Aleko who was responsible for the ELAS reservists in Voden during the German occupation; his wife Hrisula a member of the regional committee of CPG for Meglen region; another person named Tarzan from the village Orizartsi and the Nun-Nurse Irina from Voden, had also arrived.

The purpose of this meeting was to get the PLF leadership together with their Greek associates to discuss organizational issues as well as examine options for opening a Partisan hospital on Mount Kajmakdzhalan.

By now a whole week had passed since the initial discovery of the Partisan base camp by the Royalists and Republicans on June 28<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately none of the fighters or the leadership of PLF or CPG was aware that they had been discovered.

On the morning of July 6<sup>th</sup> around 8:00 AM, courier Giorgi Mitrev-Gunush, from the village Pochev, arrived panting and soaked in sweat. With great difficulty he made it through an approaching group which he believed were enemy soldiers. They were coming from the village Dragomantsi and were advancing towards the Pochevska wooded area. At rough count he estimated there were about 600 of them and they were well armed.

The leaders of both organizations immediately reacted and began to analyze the situation. They should have taken defensive measures sooner; however they had no confirmation that the approaching group was indeed the enemy. For example none of the villages, Vlokojanevo, Teovo, Lukovets, or Krontsevelo, in the immediate vicinity had reported enemy activity in the area. The conclusion was that the Group must have been local riflemen known to frequent the area. They did however take precautionary measures just in case.

The fighters decided to move out and retire at Staro Vlokojanevo. Defense of the headquarters was relegated to headquarters. Risto Kordalov and his group of fighters were made responsible for the defense of the PLF and CPG delegates.

Unfortunately before any of these plans could be put into action, the enemy arrived within firing range. The fighters immediately opened fire and proceeded with the evacuation.

Among the 60 or so armed Partisans there were another 30 political leaders, PLF administrators, Democrats from the city Voden and some new recruits who had not yet been armed.

The battle was intense. After a three hour bloody firefight the enemy made headway and squeezed some of the Partisan fighters out. Due to the intense firefight, ten Partisans had to abandon their position and flee. The enemy took advantage of the situation and rushed the camp. During this

critical time, while attempting to escape, a judgment error was made. Whoever was leading the PLF and CPG delegates to safety took a wrong turn and ended up face to face with the enemy.

When Captain Katsonis with his group met up with Risto Bukavalov and his group they realized that the camp was left unguarded and there was a high risk that the enemy would capture some of the delegates. They decided to return and set up position around the hills of Kusa and Dolga Livada in wait. Unfortunately the enemy did not return that way so they eventually left.

Before dawn Bukavalov and Katsonis sent Toli, one of their fighters, to the village Vlkojanevo to find out what the villagers knew. The moment he returned he gave them tragic news. Mirka Ginova, Tome Mihailov from the village Gugovo, regional activist of PLF, Dimitar Limbov from the village Vladovo, activist of PLF, Giorgi Proioev from Voden, activist of PLF, Petre Popdimitrov-Direkot from Voden, activist of PLF, Risto Stojanov from the village Karasinantsi, Gumenchisko Region, activist in CPG in Voden Region, his wife Hrisula, member of the regional committee of CPG for Meglen Region and Irina, the Nun-nurse from Voden had all been captured.

As soon as it became dark, Bukavalov and Katsonis, along with about 20 fighters, left and traveled overnight to Kronchelsko. They spent the day hiding in Momin Grob and during the evening they left for Bunarot, the main PLF base in Rodivsko place. When they arrived they met Risto Kordalov, Vangel Shamardanov-Ilindenski, Giorgi Atanasov-Blazhe, Lazo Kamchev and about 20 other fighters who had succeeded in penetrating the enemy ring and had escaped.

According to eyewitness accounts the group, consisting of PLF and CPG delegates, was led by Mirka Ginova and Georgios Mustakidis during the final moments before their capture. Before entering Kusa and Dolga Livada it seems that instead of taking the path towards the PLF detachment they took an entirely different path. Obviously whoever led them did not know the terrain well so instead of escaping the ambush they literally fell into enemy hands. Mirka was the only one in the group that was armed and only with a handgun.

She held off the enemy as much as she could but when all her rounds were gone the enemy subdued them in hand to hand combat. Enemy soldiers immediately began to abuse and beat their captives, treating Mirka the worst.

A little later the prisoners were transferred to lockup in the Vlkojanevo Monastery just above the village Vlkojanevo.

The moment they were locked-up the Royalists and Republicans began interrogations to uncover the captives' identities.

They suspected that one of the females they captured was the infamous Irini Gini (Mirka Ginova) but they needed verification. Since no one

would confess, even after extreme torture, the Royalists and Republicans brought in some of Mirka's former co-workers to point her out. They did the same for the other captives.

After establishing their identities the prisoners were brutally tortured for days. They were beaten with rifle-butts, punched and had their hair pulled. The Greek Royalists and Republicans endeavored to break the prisoners' spirits and then paraded them through the streets of Voden. They wanted the people to see them for the wretches they were. The people however did not see them that way. Instead they saw the Royalists and Republicans for the monsters that they were and could hardly contain their hate for them.

The parades unfortunately were only the beginning of the indignities Mirka and the others would suffer before they were put to death.

Mirka was hated the most and as a result suffered the most. According to eyewitness accounts, Mirka was taken outside of Vodev several times and tortured. In Giavaliochitsa she was buried underground alive and shot several times in the forehead with blanks. For three days and nights a motorcycle was left idling under her window to mask her screams while they shoved needles under her fingernails, tightened a metal band around her head and placed boiling hot eggs under her armpits. But nothing could break Mirka and in the end she was as hard as granite.

A few days later, on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1946, the prisoners were transferred to Enidzhe Vardar, where they were tried by a military tribunal and sentenced to death in accordance with law 509. They were accused of being traitors, of having autonomist and separatist desires and of committing treasonous acts against the state. They particularly wanted to ruin Mirka Gineva's good name and reputation.

During the trial, which was held at the first elementary school in Enidzhe Vardar behind closed doors, the Royalists and Republicans made every effort to paint PLF and the Macedonian freedom movement in Aegean Macedonia as nothing more than an autonomous movement aspiring to partition Aegean Macedonia from Greece.

No one besides military types and gendarmes were allowed to enter the court during the trial but some accounts of the trial did manage to leak out. Mirka's trial was unforgettable. Friend and foe alike admired her. She was fearless and spoke the truth. In response to the trumped-up charges, in part she replied "I am a leader of PLF. During the occupation (German, Bulgarian and Italian) I fought against the Germans and the henchmen Kalchev and Dimchev and hit them with the same fanaticism as I fought against the German occupier. PLF is not a military but a political democratic organization fighting for equal rights for the Macedonians within the confines of the Greek State. We fight for freedom and democracy..."

Mirka Ginova and associates Tome Mihailov, Dimitar Limbov, Giorgi Proioy, Petre Popdimitrov-Direkot, Risto Stojanov and Georgios Mustakidis-Aleko were found guilty of all charges and condemned to death by execution. Hrisula and Irina were sentenced to hard labour and life imprisonment.

Three days after the verdict Mirka and her associates were taken to the Enidzhe Vardar cemetery and placed in front of a firing squad and shot. Mirka met her death singing the international hymn. This heroic act was even recognized by the enemy.

A report to headquarters of the regular army, among other things said, "The seven executed were in good spirits and refused blindfolds. The greatest bravery among them was shown by the teacher Irini Gini (Mirka Ginova) who sang the international hymn and called out slogans of freedom."

Mirka's trial received a great deal of publicity both inside and outside of Greece and inspired many young people to join the Partisans. Associated press, on the same day of the execution, wrote the following: "26 July Solun. Early this morning the execution of Irini Gini and her six associates was carried out. A military court in Andes Vardar found them guilty. Gini is the first woman in Greece to be executed for political reasons".

The most glittering testimony of Mirka's heroic death however, came from an anonymous letter sent to her father by a military reporter from a Greek newspaper.

The letter in part said, "At six o'clock this morning, sadly, Irini lost her life. My respects for your daughter who faced her end with a smile on her face singing courageously to the astonishment of everyone present. She was amazingly heroic and showed no fear in the face of death. It was the same for the other six but mostly for her. I am not writing you to compliment your daughter but to tell you the truth as I witnessed it..."

Mirka Ginova gave her life for the freedom of Macedonia and the Macedonian people. She suffered immensely but died a hero, which is why in the hearts and minds of all Macedonians she will forever be remembered as a fighter and a legend.

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