

## **Interview - Victor Bivell, Macedonian Australian Publisher and Activist**

*This interview was by Irena Radovanovic of the Macedonian Information Agency (MIA) and published on 12 May, 2017. It was also published in Dnevnik on 15 May 2017.*

*Victor Bivell, publisher at Pollitecon publications, is a prominent Macedonian Australian activist best known for his promotion of some of the most important books from and about Macedonia in English. In an interview with MIA, he talks about his work, his calls to Macedonians to return to their native land, as well as a DNA test which he says throws fresh light on the disputed theories about the settlement of the Balkans.*

### **Tells us a bit about yourself. How long have you been in Australia?**

A long time. My family is from the Aegean part of Macedonia. My grandfathers arrived in Australia in 1926 and 1937, and my parents arrived in 1955. I was the first in our family to be born in Australia, in 1957. I have lived in Australia my whole life. I was educated and went to university here. I worked and later started my business here. I married and my family is here.

### **You are a publisher. What are the main titles you have published so far?**

I publish in English on Macedonian themes. I started Pollitecon Publications in 1992 and so far I have published 13 books on paper. Most are factual books about life in Aegean Macedonia, but I also published the first English language translations of the novels Black Seed, The Big Water and Pirey.

I've also done several online publishing projects. These include the online reprinting of the Macedonian Spark newspaper that was printed in Australia from 1946 to 1957. There are just over 100 editions. In 2004 I did Macedonian Communities Around the World, which was the first compilation of as many of the names as I could find of the cities, towns and villages around the world where there are Macedonian settlements. There are about 3,000. Another project was Treaties and Legal Cases. These are copies in full of the many international treaties that divided Macedonia, such as the Treaty of Bucharest, plus some of the national and international legal cases that have affected Macedonia and Macedonians. There is a Life in Aegean Macedonia section where I publish original articles about the people, politics, culture, history, and diaspora of the Aegeans. My latest project is Free Ebooks, where I make available free online copies of books on Macedonian human rights, politics, history, language and economics. So far there are over 160 free books on the web site. See [www.pollitecon.com](http://www.pollitecon.com).

### **You recently announced the results of a DNA test you performed. Tell me about your test, and the results.**

Like many people I wanted to know more about my origins, so I did a genetic test with Family Tree DNA in Texas. This showed that I am 90 per cent European and 11 per cent Middle Eastern from Asia Minor (the extra 1 per cent is simply rounding.) My European part is 66 per cent Southeastern European, 15 per cent East European and 9 per cent West and Central European.

What is also interesting is that if the Slav migration theory is correct then I should have a much higher percentage of Eastern European than 15 per cent, and if Greek propaganda is correct then I should be 100 per cent East European.

But the results are very different. They say on my paternal line - my father's father's father and so on - that I belong to the E-M35 haplogroup. Academic research says this haplogroup is strongly associated with migration into SE Europe about 11,000 years ago that brought neolithic languages, agriculture and technologies from the Middle East into the Balkans and Europe. So there may be a connection and it may be that my family has been in the Balkans for a very long time, possibly for up to 11,000 years.

That's a lot more than the 1,400 years we are told by the Slav migration theory and Greek propaganda.

The results show that I have distant genetic relatives in all the neighbouring Balkan countries as well as in Europe and other parts of the world.

All of this has huge implications for my identity, and for the way I see nationalism in the Balkans, especially the aggressive forms of Greek, Albanian and Bulgarian nationalism.

**You recently asked Macedonians around the world to think about ways to help Macedonia, including the idea of returning to Macedonia. How do you see this happening?**

For a long time Macedonia has been in danger of migrating itself out of existence. I think we need to reverse that flow. So I put forward the idea that Macedonia needs Macedonians. This will help to ensure the survival of the Macedonian homeland and help to grow the economy.

It will also provide political stability. Statistics show that where a majority population falls to a low level, a danger zone below 70 or 75 per cent, it can lead to political instability and civil war. Examples are Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Fiji, and Macedonia, among others.

So I would like to encourage the huge number of Macedonians around the world to think about how they can help Macedonia. That may be by visiting Macedonia as a tourist, by investing in Macedonia, supporting the economy by buying Macedonian goods, or by re-establishing or strengthening family connections and friendships.

Moving to Macedonia to live would be a big move so it is not for everyone. I think it would best suit Macedonian citizens who wish to return. It may also suit ethnic Macedonians in other

countries who are not Macedonian citizens but for whatever reason may want to make a new start in life.

### **Do you plan to return to Macedonia?**

My origins are in Aegean Macedonia, so I am not a citizen of the Republic of Macedonia. I am an Australian citizen and for a number of years I have thought about applying for dual Macedonian citizenship. I looked into it, but it is not easy.

I also have an option to apply for dual Greek citizenship. I am banned from entering Greece, I presume due to my political activism. If I apply for dual Greek citizenship it may help me to visit my family's village, and I could vote in elections, among other advantages. I am still thinking about my options and if and what I should do.

### **How successful have the Macedonian-Australians been in presenting the truth about Macedonia and countering Greek propaganda?**

I have been active in the Macedonian diaspora in Australia for 25 years so I can confirm that there are very many talented and hard working Macedonian activists in Australia. Macedonia should not doubt that the diaspora in Australia is not only very big but it is also very proud of its Macedonian heritage and it has a huge love of Macedonia.

Like the rest of the world, there is plenty of Greek propaganda in Australia. The simple reason that the Macedonian activists have not been able to fully counter this propaganda and achieve more is that there are even more Greeks in Australia than Macedonians. Up to three or four times more. There are some good politicians in Australia who understand the Macedonian issue and cause. But most politicians just look at the numbers and see more Greeks.

It is said that politics is a numbers game. We see it here in Australia every day. That is why the stability of Macedonia is also a numbers game. A good way to ensure the survival of the Macedonian homeland is to own the land by having feet on the ground. The Albanians proved that in Kosovo. The Greeks proved that in Aegean Macedonia. It is now time for the Macedonians to do the same in Macedonia.

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