

Chapter 4: The Macedonian Question in Communist Bulgaria

I. Introduction

Several years ago while in Bulgaria I read in the press that Sofia University may be opening a Macedonian language and literature course. When I called the administrative office to enquire about such a course, there was a pause at the other end of the line followed a sharp response: 'What nationality are you, madam?'. The voice had a familiar tone of irony, reproach and anger. I said automatically, I am Bulgarian.' Then why don't you get yourself a Bulgarian history text book and educate yourself! Shame on you!' The outraged woman put the phone down.

Not long after that I was speaking with a young Bulgarian historian who was writing a new textbook. I was telling him about my recent trip to the Turkish regions of the country and asked whether he would include the history of the Bulgarian Muslims in his book. 'We can't afford to write histories of Turks, Macedonians, Pomaks, etc. because there will be nothing left from Bulgarian history itself. We have to have a national history, like everyone in the West.' Behind us on a shabby wall there was a fresh inscription 'VMRO', the initials of the resurrected Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation in the new Bulgaria. He pointed at it and said: 'They are weak as they have always been... Isn't it sad?'

When the bus from Sofia to Skopje stopped at a town in Pirin Macedonia before the border, a local young man approached me: 'Excuse me, are you Macedonian?' Before I managed to digest the question, a passing woman gave an answer smilingly: 'We are all Macedonians'.

The first story is one of the many, which show the emotional texture of the word 'Macedonian' and the demand for 'correct' historical awareness of the national question in Bulgaria on a daily basis. The second one illustrates the prevailing fear of losing Bulgarian national identity and the insecurity of not having enough of it because of 'other' identities in the same country. The last one reveals in simple words the essence of the Macedonian question in Bulgaria. It is about overlapping identities: some say all Macedonians are Bulgarians; others that all Bulgarians are Macedonians.

The most impressive feature of Macedonian question in Bulgaria remains the emotional intensity of its past - it has by now a history of more than one hundred years - and its capacity to inspire the present. The issue has been central for understanding the Bulgarian nationalism in general and under communism in particular. Fundamentally it constitutes a two-sided debate. It disputes the existence of a distinct Macedonian ethnic identity based on history, culture and language and questions the legitimacy of the Macedonian nationhood. It has been discussed mainly as a historical question involving the geopolitics of the Balkans after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. Later it is seen as a result of the communist idea to create a separate Macedonian state, nation, language and history. It is also generally assumed that the Bulgarian communist policy on the Macedonian question was internationalist and lacked the nationalist passion of the pre-war government.

This chapter focuses on the effects of the Macedonian question on the formation, development and changes in the communist concept of Bulgarian national identity. The Bulgarian communist party policy on the Macedonian problem after the Second World War kept changing until the great changes of 1989. Although the BCP claimed that it stood for internationalism in relation to the Macedonian question, after 1948 the Bulgarian communists' project was to homogenise the country and to deny the existence

of Macedonian identity in Bulgaria. The party also sought to compose a consolidated national history of Bulgaria, which required certain twists in the policy of communism. Most importantly the Bulgarian communist leadership, was exceptionally loyal to Moscow and tried to balance Soviet demands for internationalist policy and Bulgarian nationalism. Yet at the end the BCP reintroduced the traditional view about the Macedonian question according to which Macedonian and Bulgarian people were ethnically the same. Initially the BCP's ideas about developing Macedonia as an independent state in order to be included in a communist federation represented a break from the mainstream Bulgarian politics, which envisioned Bulgarian and Macedonian state and national unity as the final aim of the Macedonian movement in Bulgaria. Although throughout its rule the BCP accepted that there may be a political Macedonian nation in Yugoslavia, the party viewed that in their own socialist country Bulgarians and Macedonians had to be united in ethnic terms.

II. Historical Background: The Religious Factor

Historically the Macedonian question in Bulgaria was a struggle for the territorial unity of the geographical lands of Macedonia with the Bulgarian state. Conceptually it was born out of the Ottoman decline that led to the national liberation movements in the Balkans. The struggle to liberate Macedonia from Ottoman rule was perceived as a part of Bulgarian national unification. On one side it was a direct expression of the rise of the Balkan nationalism and on the other it was a reflection of the Great Powers interests in the region.

The Bulgarian struggle for Macedonia began with the establishment of an independent Bulgarian church in 1870 known as the Exarchate. Its ambition before and after the national liberation in 1878 was to dominate the region of Macedonia. The Exarchate demanded the legitimate creation of one state for the Christians of Bulgaria and Macedonia. The Exarchate sought to gain the loyalty of the Slavic-speaking population of Macedonia and persuade them to accept one distinct identity through religious communion with the Bulgarians. Further, it aimed to stimulate the development of national consciousness towards achieving political power. It stood for the integration of Macedonia into the Bulgarian independent state and claimed that the national, state and religious boundaries should be congruent. Thus the Bulgarian movement for unification with Macedonia started as a church organisation and envisioned the unity of the Bulgarian and Macedonian communities in one nation-state. This ideal was never to be achieved.

The Bulgarian Exarchate was established in 1870 by *firman* (decree) issued by the Sultan. It was an autonomous Orthodox Church under the Greek patriarch's jurisdiction. Thus

the national church was created eight years before the state. It was largely seen as the first national institution using the Bulgarian language. This was not an unusual development in the process of nation-formation, for religious unity is very often perceived as the basis of creating states. However, in the case of the Bulgarian Exarchate the main question was not the establishment of religious status or unity of the Christians, since they already enjoyed this under the Ottoman law. Balkan Christianity had the status of a *millet* under the control of the Greek patriarchate in Istanbul.¹The *millet* was essentially a recognition of religious identity. But the movement for an independent Bulgarian church demanded its independent institution. It was also fused with national ideas so that the struggle for a national church served as the commencement of national awareness. The movement for Bulgarian national independence was based on the movement for religious Christian unity.

The importance of religion in the nation formation of the Balkan states has been viewed as one of the specific features of Balkan nationalism. King argues that religious identification is the key element of the Balkan national consciousness. He illustrates the close connection between nationality and religion on the Balkans with the case of Bulgaria: ‘The establishment in 1870 of the Bulgarian Exarchate, whose territory included all of Macedonia, Dobruja, and western Thrace, as well as present-day Bulgaria, advanced the Bulgarian claim, particularly in light of the close connection between nationality and religion in the Balkans’.²The political dimension of the ‘church-liberating struggles of the Bulgarians’, as they are known in the Bulgarian historiography, crystallised in its content

¹ The *millet* was an administrative entity which defined the status of any religious community living under Ottoman rule: Christians, Armenians, Jews etc.

when the Exarchate started educational activities and church-building in the Macedonian lands. Whether the population of Macedonia was to be enticed by the Bulgarian Exarchate was actually a political question about its ethnic and national identity. The new generations were to study in Bulgarian schools and pray in Bulgarian churches, and as a way to consolidate a Bulgarian national identity. The biggest achievement of the Exarchate was to boost Bulgarian-language education. In general language and religion were seen as the most effective uniting factors in the creation of the nation: 'Through religion and education the Christians of Macedonia were to acquire a national identity - Bulgarian, Greek or Serbian - depending upon one's religious affiliation and the school a child attended'.³

The Macedonian question was further complicated because of the contesting claims of Bulgaria's neighbours. The Bulgarian Exarchate competed with the Greek Patriarchate and the Serbian church over Macedonia. The Bulgarian activities were quite effective and there was a significant redirection of pupils to the Bulgarian Exarchate, particularly from the Greeks, who had the most powerful church in the Balkans. The success of the Bulgarian idea in Macedonia was due to combination of factors: principally, Greeks treated the Slavic parishioners namely as inferior, and the weakening of Ottoman rule, which made significant concessions to the Bulgarian church struggle by granting it independence. These factors enhanced the Bulgarian national liberation movement and attracted many Slav people in Macedonia, pulling them away from the Greek influence. Bulgarians ultimately succeeded in the competition with the Greek and the Serbian

² Robert R. King, Minorities under Communism: Nationalities as a Source of Tension among Balkan Communist States, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 187.

churches in Macedonia. At the turn of the century, out of total 1,854 churches in the 15 dioceses of Macedonia, 1,232 were Bulgarian. The Macedonian regions of Veles and Nis as well as the Serbian region of Pirot were included in the Bulgarian Exarchate while the districts of Skopje, Monastir, Stip, and Ohrid were not.⁴

In general Bulgarian Exarchate supported non-violent changes towards the gradual integration of Bulgaria and Macedonia in one nation. Bulgarian priests advocated co-existence with the Ottomans and by building up good relations with the rulers gained permission to increase the number of churches and schools in Macedonia. Yet at the same time the Bulgarian church movement had strong political ambitions, which were much more difficult to achieve. The aim of gaining political power was central to the Bulgarian Exarchate. Political power was seen as the next stage of the Bulgarian national development, after the achievement of the religious unity of all Bulgarian Christians.

Thus the movement for an independent and united Bulgarian church extended to a movement for national Bulgarian recognition. In this way the religious aspect blended fully with the nationalist Bulgarian movement. All pretenders for Macedonian nationhood went through the same development. Each of the competing churches aspired not only to achieve the spiritual unity of its people but also to become a leader of the respective community on the path towards national unity. Macedonia was caught in the middle of these competing claims. The Macedonian question - namely with whom should Macedonians unite - was on the rise.

³ Duncan M. Perry, The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Liberation Movements 1893-1903, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), p. 28.

⁴ See Perry, The Politics of Terror, 1988.

III. Bulgarian Independence and the Macedonian Question

The Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878 changed the entire political context of the Macedonian question. The whole political map of the Balkans was redrawn. Bulgaria took part in the war with its partisan forces, the so-called '*Bulgarsko opulchenie*', which fought on the side of the Russian army. Turkey was defeated by Russia, which was supported also by Serbia, Romania and Montenegro. The preliminary peace treaty was negotiated and concluded on 3 March 1878. It became known as the San Stefano treaty.⁵ As a result of the war Bulgaria extended from the Danube to the Aegean and from the Vardar and Morava valleys to the Black Sea. Bulgaria included the whole of Macedonia without Thessaloniki and without Halkidiki peninsula. The Great Powers were seriously alarmed by this arrangement. Bulgaria was seen as a future big state, and a potential tool of Russian influence in the Balkans.

The Great Powers decided then to revise the San Stefano treaty, and on 13 June 1878 called the Berlin Congress. The Berlin Congress concluded with the signing of a new treaty on 13 July 1878. Accordingly the Bulgarian territory was split into three parts. Bulgaria proper was defined in the area between the Danube and the Balkan mountains. The area south of these mountains was to be an autonomous Ottoman province called Eastern Rumelia. Macedonia was returned to the Sultan, though rather vague promises were made that it would be granted an independent administration in the future.⁶

⁵ See Traite Preliminaire De St. Stefano, Du 3 Mars/19 Fevrier 1878.

⁶ See Richard J. Crampton, Bulgaria 1878-1918: A History, (East European Monographs, No. CXXXVIII), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 23-24.

The revision of the preliminary peace settlement, which drew new boundaries in the entire region was strongly felt as very unfair by the new Balkan states. The decisions of the Great powers were interpreted as politically expedient for their own interests, rather than reflecting the ambitions of the emerging nation-states. The ambitions of Bulgarian nationalism were badly damaged. Hence the initial 'inclusion' of Macedonia into the Bulgarian state was accepted as 'right and just', whereas the following 'exclusion' acquired the meaning of 'wrong and unjust'. This notion of injustice towards Macedonia caused by outside politics became a permanent feature of the Bulgarian national mind. The revision of the San Stefano treaty marked the early stages of the Bulgarian national legitimacy. The loss of Macedonia became symbol of Bulgarian nationalism impaired. The Macedonian question became a national Bulgarian myth, born out of the territorial division of the country. The myth about the unjust treatment of Bulgaria held that Bulgaria fall victim of foreign powers and the homeland of the Bulgarian people was dismembered.⁷

⁷ See Hristo Hristov, Stoiko Gruncharov and Elena Statelova (eds.), Istoria na Bulgaria: Vuzstanoviavane i utvurzhdavane na bulgarskata durzhava. Natsionalno-osvoboditelni borbi (1878-1903), (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Akademia na Naukite, 1991), chapter 2, pp. 38-59. For the most recent view on the emotional perception of the decisions of the Berlin Congress see Andrei Pantev, Godini na demratsia: Edna bulgarska istoria, (Sofia; 'Edem 21', 1992).

IV. The Macedonian Revolutionary Organisations

After the Berlin Congress of 1878 Bulgarian nationalism aspired to reverse historical events and restore justice for Bulgaria. This meant above all the Bulgarian unification with Macedonia. Macedonian organisations, created after the Berlin Congress of 1878 became an inseparable part of the Bulgarian revolutionary tradition. Their leaders created a new image of Bulgarian freedom fighters: national liberation revolutionaries, the vanguard for ideas of Bulgarian nationalism. Although Macedonia was not re-united with Bulgaria, the Macedonian revolutionaries were romanticised as heroes in the struggle for Bulgarian national unity. The fight for Macedonia was mythologised as a glorious period of Bulgarian national development. In Anderson's terms, the Macedonian revolutionary organisations became part of the Bulgarian national 'imagination', which facilitated the nation-state building process. The new Bulgarian state and the Exarchate held that the solution to the Macedonian question was to be sought in the gradual merger of people and territories, and generally preached submission to the Ottomans in the meantime. But in fact Bulgarian schools in Macedonia became 'hotbeds' of national agendas. As Perry observes: 'Bulgarian Exarchate schools were the training grounds for troublemakers'.⁸

The Ottomans preferred to ignore the fact that there was a new generation growing up in Macedonia, which had revolutionary ideas and was also quite unhappy with their life under the Ottoman administration. This generation acquired new intellectual skills and was eager to practice them. Moreover the Ottoman administration had very little control over the educational programme in the Christian schools in Macedonia. The long-lasting religious, social and language barriers between Muslims and Christians under the *millet* system helped the young intelligentsia to flourish as a separate social group with its own

national consciousness. This new generation shifted the view about the non-violent advancement of Macedonian liberation as preached by the church, to more radical agenda for change. The new idea was to organise revolutionary activities. This re-orientation was one of the most significant results of the decline of Ottoman empire. While the Bulgarian church was calling for reforms with respect to the order in the empire, the Christian subjects wanted immediate changes.

The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO or VMRO⁹) was founded in 1893 in Thessaloniki. The Supreme Macedonian Committee of VMRO was established in Bulgaria 1895. Its members were also known as the Supremacists. The purpose of the organisation was to lead the Macedonian liberation movement. But from the outset VMRO was divided into two factions: those who were in favour of the establishment of a separate Macedonia and those who aspired for Macedonian unification with Bulgaria.

VMRO was a secret organisation. VMRO's structure was neither open nor democratic. The organisation recruited supporters from the Bulgarian-language gymnasiums and high schools and almost all of them were supporters of the Bulgarian Exarchate. VMRO was not a popular organisation. By 1894 it had 50 members only. Rather it was an organisation, which in many ways extracted its support from the population. The VMRO activist (*'komita'*) was an outlaw who lived off the land and depended upon the peasantry for information, food and other material aid. But the Bulgarian peasantry did not get involved in a militant actions, unless directly provoked, and in general did not share the revolutionary ideas of the more educated revolutionaries. This does not mean that

⁸ Perry, Politics of Terror, p. 30.

⁹ VMRO is the acronym in Bulgarian (Vutreshna Makedonska Revolutsiona Organizatsia).

VMRO did not get any support from the countryside, but rather that it came from composed bands of uprooted people living in poor conditions. Town people, students and teachers also helped the organisation. VMRO's main source of funding was through donors, kidnappings or extortion.¹⁰ Perry defines VMRO as a 'prototypical liberation - terrorist movement found also in other agrarian pre-industrialised societies where a small collection of educated people seek reform in the face of a stronger and more powerful state apparatus.¹¹ VMRO's slogan was 'Freedom or Death' and the foundation principles were. VMRO operated through secret committees and had an idealistic vision about rebellion as a largely emotional and spontaneous revolutionary action.

Although VMRO and the Supremacists were rival organisations, the lines distinguishing them were often blurred, especially at grass root support and membership. Until around 1900 they shared the same goal: the establishment of an independent Macedonia. Later, the Supremacists shifted entirely towards union with Bulgaria, whereas VMRO consisted of different factions and changed policy several times from independent Macedonia to integration with Bulgaria. Many Bulgarian historians interpret the hesitations in VMRO's agenda as a proof of the power of the integrationist element within the organisation and prefer to ignore the fact that VMRO was seriously considering the idea of independent Macedonia. On the contrary Macedonian scholars give prominence to VMRO as supporters of Macedonian independence only and deny any inclinations towards union with Bulgaria.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 76-79.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 212.

¹² For detailed account of the differences between VMRO and the Supremacists see Crampton, Bulgaria 1878-1918, pp. 236-237. For the prevailing Macedonian opinion on the same topic see Ksente Bogoev, Manol Pandevski, Ivan Kantardjiev and Krste

The main contradiction between VMRO and the Supremacists was the question of how to organise the revolution. Unlike VMRO the Supremacists believed in organised military action led by experienced Bulgarian army officers. VMRO was a clandestine organisation whereas the Supremacists were a recognised organisation supported by the Bulgarian government. The latter had more members. The fact that they aspired to be led by professional military men gave the Supremacists a particular power. Despite these differences, there were two main similarities between the two Macedonian revolutionary organisations. First of all both used guerrilla tactics as well as terrorism. The Supremacists' violent tactics went as far as to involve Bulgarian governmental representatives. The disagreements between the two factions led to assassinations on the streets of Sofia and violent extraction of support in the villages of border regions between Bulgaria and Macedonia.¹³

Second, VMRO in its all incarnations and the Supremacists aimed to gain the support of the Christian Slav populations of Macedonia and Bulgaria. Vlachs were the only other ethnic community involved in VMRO activities and they were the only non-Slav members involved in Macedonian affairs.¹⁴ The Supremacists focused on the liberated Bulgarian lands and their membership was entirely Slav Christian. Albanians, Turks, Jews,

Bitovski (eds.), Sto godini od osnovavaneto na VMRO i 90 godini of Ilindenskoto vostanie: prilozi od nauchen sobir održan na 21-23 Oktomvri, 1993, (Skopje: Makedonska Akademia na Naukite, 1994).

¹³ For analysis of the assassination of the Bulgarian prime-minister Stefan Stambolov and the Macedonian question see Crampton, 'The Decline and Fall of Stambolov, 1891-94'. Bulgaria 1878-1918, pp. 143-158 and Duncan M. Perry, Stefan Stambolov and the Emergence of Modern Bulgaria, 1870-1895, (USA: Duke University Press, 1993).

Gypsies or other Muslims did not participate in Macedonian revolutionary organisations. This marked the Macedonian question as being an exclusively ethnic Bulgarian issue. The highest point of VMRO's revolutionary activities was the Ilinden uprising of 1903, which became a central myth of the new Macedonian history, the premise of which is that it was about independent Macedonia. At the same time according to modern Bulgarian history, the Ilinden uprising and its leaders are the culmination of the revolutionary struggle for Macedonian and Bulgarian unity. The dispute over the events as well as the heroes of the Ilinden uprising continue to the present day.¹⁵

Modern Bulgarian historians underline the failure of the VMRO as a result of the weak policy of the Bulgarian Exarchate in Macedonia and the 'fragility of Bulgarian nationalism', which acted defensively.¹⁶ The main argument is that Macedonian revolutionary organisations were essentially a Bulgarian national phenomenon.¹⁷ Macedonian historians underline the differences between the two organisations and claim that VMRO was exclusively a Macedonian national organisation, whereas the Supremacists represented the Bulgarian ambitions in Macedonia and used terrorist tactics

¹⁴ See Hugh Poulton, Who Are the Macedonians?, (London: Hurst & Company, 1995), pp. 52-57.

¹⁵ For the official Macedonian opinion about who do the leaders of the Ilinden uprising belong to see Ljuben Lape, Mihalo Apostolski, Dimitur Mitrev and Petur Stojanov (eds.), Kniga za Ilinden. Zbornik na trudovi - po povod 65-godishninata od Ilindenskoto Vostanie, (Skopje: Institut za Nacionalna Istorija, 1969).

¹⁶ Zina Markova, Bulgarskata Exarchia 1870-1879, (Sofia: Bulgarska Akademia na Naukite, 1989).

¹⁷ See Diameter Gotsev, Mladezhkite Natsionalno-Osvoboditelni organizatsii na makedonskite bulgari 1919 - 1941, (Sofia: BAN, 1988).

all of the time to achieve their aims.¹⁸ Attempts to portray this period as a shared experience of two overlapping national agendas have been rejected. The activities of the Macedonian revolutionary organisations did not satisfy Bulgarian national aspirations. But at the same time they created a number of markers of national identity both for the Bulgarians and the Macedonians. The history of Macedonian organisations became a major feature of both Bulgarian and Macedonian nationhood. The most prominent leaders of the Macedonian uprisings, Gotse Delchev and Iane Sandanski are declared national heroes in Bulgaria as well as in Macedonia. Both sides claim their mythologised personalities as symbols of their own nation-building movements. Yet in reality they are shared designators of nationhood and a common historical heritage for both countries. But as shown by Bulgaria and Macedonia, sharing history and nationhood has not been appreciated by Balkan nationalism.

At the same time the poor results of VMRO and the Supremacists sealed the Bulgarian national consciousness not only with notions of national revolutionary tradition but also with a sense of insecurity and dissatisfaction. Bulgarian nationalism was deeply disappointed by the failure of the Macedonian revolutionary organisations to achieve the unification of Bulgaria and Macedonia. Thus the notion was created that nation building in modern Bulgaria was interrupted, darkened and remained unfinished.

¹⁸ See Ivan Kantardjiev, 'VMRO i Makedonskoto osloboditelno dvizhenie od krajot na prvata svetska vojna do raspatanjeto na monizmot (1919-1990)' in Sto godini od osnovavaneto na VMRO i 90 godini of Ilindenskoto vostanie, pp. 44-73.

V. Independent Bulgaria and Macedonian Organisations

The Macedonian question was a priority for independent Bulgaria. In the 1890s between 100,000 and 200,000 Macedonians emigrated to Bulgaria. Many of these newcomers were educated in the revolutionary spirit of the Macedonian liberation movement. In the Bulgarian capital, Sofia, Macedonian émigrés made up about 18,000-20,000 (26-29%) of the total population of 70,000. They had a substantial presence in the army (33%) and of the Bulgarian government officials (43%).¹⁹The émigrés kept the Macedonian question high on the political agenda. The Macedonian involvement in Bulgarian politics also divided the political establishment of the country between those who supported the ‘return’ of Macedonia within Bulgaria and those who did not.

At the same time, the idea of a separate and independent Macedonia was gaining ground. This possibility was considered most dangerous for the Bulgarian-minded Macedonians, who thought that once Bulgarian, Macedonians should remain Bulgarian forever. Yet after the collapse of the Ottoman power, it was obvious that while there was a strong desire among people living in Macedonia to join in one state with Bulgaria, Macedonian nationalism was also on the rise. Macedonian revolutionary organisations expressed the aspirations and divisions of Bulgarian nationalism in relation to Macedonia. No other movement in the history of independent Bulgaria was as important for Bulgarian nationhood as the struggles for Macedonia. Even now, the Macedonian revolutionary organisations continue to symbolise devotion to Bulgarian national unity. The conspiratorial character of the Macedonian revolutionary organisations favoured the idea that political change was about secret contracts, terrorist attacks, and forcible extraction

¹⁹ See Perry, *Politics of Terror*, p. 35. See also Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918*, pp. 150-151.

of support. The Macedonian liberation movement saw outside forces and 'other' people as enemies of the national battle. It was exclusively a Christian movement and underlined the importance of religion for Bulgarian nationalism.

VI. The Macedonian Question and the Balkan Wars (1911-13)

Bulgaria fought in the Balkan Wars to gain the Macedonian lands and people. Bulgaria's attachment to Macedonia was highly emotional and drove the Bulgarian policy during the period. For the Balkan Wars were not only over territorial disputes but also disputed national identities. Macedonia was an inseparable part of Bulgarian nationhood. For most Bulgarians to fight for Macedonia meant to fight for Bulgaria itself. Yet despite the Bulgarian victory over Turkey in the First Balkan War, the Bulgarian involvement in the wars became known as the country's 'national catastrophe'.²⁰ Bulgaria suffered heavy losses in the Second Balkan War and the way the wars were conducted raised many controversial points about Bulgarian politics. But the perception that Bulgaria had to fight for Macedonia was never questioned.

Communist Bulgarian history tried to separate the two issues: the Bulgarian involvement in the Balkan wars in general and Bulgarian conduct over the Macedonian question during the wars. Communist historians claimed that although Macedonia was a big loss to Bulgaria, the Bulgarian involvement in the Balkan wars was conducted wrongly by 'Greater Bulgarian chauvinism' (*velikobulgarski shovinizum*), as the Bulgarian nationalist aspirations to Macedonia were labelled. This formula aimed to reconcile Bulgarian communism with nationalism in relation to the Bulgarian involvement in the Balkan wars: to reject completely the Bulgarian right to fight for Macedonia was to go too far, but to assert that it was all done in the name of Bulgarian national unity was not

²⁰ Bulgaria won in the First Balkan War which saw the Ottomans lose all mainland European Turkey, except Istanbul. By the end of May 1913 the Balkan allies and Turkey signed the Treaty of London, according to which Bulgaria acquired the whole of the southern part of Dobrudja, but only one-ninth of Macedonia.

acceptable either according to communist doctrine. To blame the Bulgarian bourgeoisie alone for the Bulgarian defeat seemed like an acceptable compromise. Yet the idea that any struggle for Macedonia could be viewed as excessive never gained popularity among the Bulgarian public. The prevailing feeling was that nobody did enough for the Macedonian question in Bulgaria.

In March 1912 Serbia and Bulgaria, which were allies in the First Balkan War, signed a treaty of 'friendship and union'. Actually the treaty was about partitioning Macedonian territory between the two countries. There were to be two zones: the so called 'undisputed' and 'disputed' areas. The 'undisputed' territory of Macedonia was to be assigned to Bulgaria.²¹

Greece disagreed with this arrangement, and Serbia was not satisfied either. Both countries started secret negotiations with Romania, Montenegro and even the Ottoman empire, about how to partition Macedonia in a new way. The division of Macedonia, combined with the internal political disagreements within the Bulgarian government, as well as the personal views of the Bulgarian monarch, Ferdinand, led to the decision to fight again. Bulgaria started the Second Balkan War in 1913, only a month after the end of the first one. This time Bulgaria was defeated and in August 1913 the treaty of Bucharest was signed. As a result Macedonia was partitioned again, this time between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. But Bulgaria was hoping for much more than it received, retaining only a small part of Macedonia.

²¹ It included the lands south of the line stretching from Kriva Palanka to Ohrid. The latter included the lands north of the same line including the towns of Skopje, Struga and Tetovo. These were planned to remain subject to arbitration by the Russian tsar.

Yet Bulgarians insisted that the decision to fight another war was correct in view of the 'unjust' partition of Macedonia and the rivalry over the Macedonian territories, which riddled relations with Serbia and Greece. Bulgarian diplomacy was blamed for the failure. Yet the reason behind the Bulgarian 'national catastrophe' during the Balkan Wars - namely the desire to re-gain Macedonia - overrode other considerations and remained unchallenged.

After the Balkan Wars the entire region was hugely damaged and unsettled. Refugees and displaced people were dispersed everywhere. The report of the Carnegie Commission, published first in 1914, registered the consequences of the wars and the policies each of the governments involved carried out on the population.²² The rival claims to Macedonia were summed up by the Commission, which concluded that the Macedonian question during the Balkan wars concerned three main issues: Bulgaria believed firmly in its 'historic right' to possess Macedonia; Serbia also held claim over the Macedonians, which was that Macedonians belonged to Serbian people because they had similar customs; and Greeks claimed that Macedonia was part of their country alone. According to the Carnegie report, out of the total of 2,258,224 people living in Macedonia 1,181,336 were identified as Bulgarians. However it underlined that the official registers were from the time of the Ottoman administration, which counted

²² The special Commission of Inquiry was set up by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. Because the information coming from the region was fragmentary, insufficient and unreliable, the Commission's aim was to establish the facts and present to the West a trustworthy picture of the situation on the Balkans. Six countries became members of the Commission: US, Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, France. The representatives travelled together to Belgrade, Thessaloniki, Athens, Constantinople and Sofia. The Commission registered what it saw in the immediate

people only according to their religious affiliation. Consequently the Christian population of the 'exarchist group' were considered of Bulgarian nationality, whereas the 'patriarchists' were calculated as Greeks. Thus Macedonians were defined as Bulgarian by religion rather than nationality.²³ The Commission also reported on the 'extermination, emigration and assimilation' of the civil populations. It concluded that 'the war is waged not only by the armies but by the nations themselves', that 'veritable migration' was characteristic of the wars, and that there was forced conversion and assimilation of entire groups of people. Essentially the Commission concluded that the Balkan wars were ethnic wars. The driving idea behind the policies of each of the countries involved was to redraw the ethnic boundaries of the Balkans.

Yet despite the defeat the Bulgarian national ambition about unity with Macedonia remained a dream. Bulgarian national history had to deal with the concept of national loss. The complex development, which involved the creation of new states out of the Ottoman empire and the redrawing of borders - after the Russian-Turkish war of 1878 as well as the Balkan Wars - shaped the Macedonian question in Bulgaria through four main issues of hot debate: the territory of Macedonia, the nationality of the people of Macedonia, the state allegiance of Macedonia (i.e., independent or linked to another country), and the language of the Macedonians (i.e., Serbian, Bulgarian or Macedonian). The Bulgarian movement for independence at the end of the 19th century gave rise to the Bulgarian nationalist desire for unification: the incorporation of the Macedonian lands and people within the new Bulgarian state. The concept of the common historical land

aftermath of the Balkan wars and collected many memories of survivors, both military and civilian.

was used to legitimise the unification of Macedonia and Bulgaria. Bulgarian unification nationalism demanded above all the territorial unity of the Bulgarian nation-state. The settlement of the Macedonian question after the end of the Balkan Wars was the biggest disappointment of modern Bulgarian nationalism.

²³ See The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict by George F. Kennan, (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993), p. 28.

VII. The Interwar Period

During the interwar period Bulgaria retained its aspirations for uniting with Macedonia. It continued to hope that the national borders would be revised, while Serbia and Greece supported the status quo. Bulgaria saw the First World War, which started in 1914, as a new chance for possible reconsideration of the Macedonian question. Bulgaria sided with the Central powers (Germany, Italy, Austria) in the war and they in turn promised Bulgaria the whole of Macedonia. This of course proved an irresistible temptation for Bulgaria. In September 1915 the Bulgarian army entered Vardar Macedonia and advanced towards Serbia proper and Aegean Macedonia. But the course of the war turned against the Central powers and in the autumn of 1918 the Entente (Britain, Russia, France) defeated the Bulgarian army near Thessaloniki. As a result the peace treaty of Neuilly was signed in November 1919. This marked the end of yet another stage of the development of the Bulgarian aspirations for national unification with Macedonia.

The persistence of the Macedonian question in Bulgarian life was not merely an irrational romantic ideal. The Macedonian question became a very serious anxiety for Bulgarian national consciousness. It raised difficult questions of national identity and ethnicity. If Macedonia was to develop further outside Bulgaria, the general question was whether a nation develops differently, if separated from its original core? Is it possible for a nation to diversify and transform into other nations? If the Bulgarian national identity was not firmly fixed, how could anyone be sure that Macedonia was not going to go its own way? The Macedonian question became the most serious question about the future of Bulgarian national integrity. Until the Second World War the core of the Macedonian

question in Bulgaria was their common religion, education, historic land and common historic enemy, the Ottomans. But this was soon to change.

VIII. The Bulgarian Communist Movement

With the end of the First World War the disintegration of the Ottoman empire was finalised. A new Balkan order was in place, and the Bulgarian position was not enviable, as Stavrianos points out: 'Bulgaria was left as the sole revisionist power in the Balkans, having fallen from second to last place in the Balkan hierarchy. The influx of refugees from Macedonia and the activities of their IMRO organisation made irredentism a prime issue in the interwar years.'²⁴ Macedonia constituted the so-called 'Southern Serbia', part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, founded in 1918, which in 1929 was renamed to Yugoslavia.

The Macedonian question also became central to the emerging communist movement in the Balkans at the beginning of the 20th century. Similar to official Balkan governmental politics in Macedonia, it was locked in a triangle between the conflicting interests of the young communist parties in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. The main factor, which the Balkan communist movements had to take into account in relation to the Macedonian question, was the position of the Soviet communist leadership. This was far from easy to do so. On one hand, Balkan communists had to design a concept which was not based on the nationalist claims in each respective country but could still appeal to the respective communities. On the other hand, any local idea had to be approved by Moscow.

The Macedonian question was central to the Balkan communists but totally dependant on the Comintern's policy. The Macedonian question became even more complicated dispute over who should be in control of the issue within the communist movement. The most effective way of conducting Macedonian affairs seemed to be to make Macedonia

part of some kind of a federal Balkan structure. On a general level this idea derived from traditional communist thinking, which favoured the creation of large state units. As Connor argues, at this time, the idea of establishing one larger unit, out of the fragmented South-East Europe, was a 'throwback to Karl Marx's bias for large units over small, regardless of ethnic distributional patterns'.²⁵

Creating large federal units was the experience of the Soviet communists with the foundation of the USSR. The idea of a Balkan federation looked like a good solution to the Macedonian question. It envisioned separation of the Macedonian regions from Greece and Yugoslavia and uniting them as independent political units under the umbrella of a Balkan Communist Federation.²⁶ The Bulgarian communists favoured the idea of a Balkan federation and the traditional minimum-programme of BCP was the creation of an independent Macedonia. Bulgarian communists would rather see Macedonia non-aligned, if not included within Bulgaria, but by no means in one state with Serbia. Independent or some kind of autonomous Macedonia was traditionally seen as an acceptable stage on the way to the integration of all Bulgarian people in one state. Both of these projects, Macedonia being a part of a Balkan federation or an independent country, were theoretically compatible with the Leninist theory of the right of self-determination. Therefore the idea of a Balkan federation seemed appropriate from the Comintern's point of view. It was supposed to end oppression of small nations, and also to blur ethnic sentiments into a communist identity, eliminating irredentism. But an agreement over Macedonia was never achieved. For Bulgarian communists, the main

²⁴ L.S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans 1815-1914*, (Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press, 1958), p.592.

²⁵ Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 130-132.

problem was how to negotiate relations with the Yugoslav communists over the Macedonian question. At that time the Bulgarians enjoyed Moscow's patronage and used it to promote their domination over other communist parties in the Balkans. In contrast, Yugoslav communists opposed the idea of Macedonia being part of a Balkan federation. In general Yugoslav communists saw the entire plan for a communist federative structure as turning the Balkans simply into an administrative organ of Moscow. Therefore Soviet command of the Macedonian question further deepened their disagreements with the Bulgarian communists over Macedonia. The Balkan federation did not make the communist cause in the Balkans more popular. Apart from the fact that the communist parties had to work underground for most of the interwar period, the requirement to obey the Comintern was seen as a great disadvantage when it came to national questions in the Balkans. For the Yugoslavs, Greeks and Romanians, receiving orders from the Soviets was often an embarrassment. But for the Bulgarian communists, because of their particular involvement with the Soviet communist tradition, this was not so. Moreover the Macedonian project, as envisioned by the Balkan communist federation, was not the worst option from the point of view of Bulgarian national interests. At this time the main attraction was clearly the possibility to dictate the Macedonian question through the Comintern, where the Bulgarian communists were represented strongly.

Yet at the same time the total dependence of the BCP on Moscow made it impossible to articulate its own policy, which could have attracted more support for the Bulgarian communists. Although 'Macedonia for the Macedonians' was the general concept of the BCP, the Comintern's position shifted according to Soviet interests, not Bulgarian interests. As Rothschild argued: "The Soviet leaders demonstrated that far from having had a definite Macedonian policy based on principle, they simply considered the area as a

²⁶ See Stavrianos, *The Balkans*, p. 614.

prize to be awarded to their most promising and obedient pupil among the Balkan communist parties'.²⁷ However the Bulgarian communists were not awarded as expected. The way the Second World War ended in Yugoslavia as well as the new role of the Soviets in Eastern Europe dramatically changed the course of the Macedonian question and the whole Balkan history in general.

²⁷ Joseph, Rothchild. The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883-1936, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 256.

IX. Communist Politics during the Bulgarian Occupation (1941-44)

With the outbreak of the Second World War Bulgaria joined the Axis Powers²⁸ and in December 1941 declared war on the Western Allies. In April the same year the Bulgarian government broke diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia and on April 19, only two days after Yugoslavia's capitulation, Bulgarian forces entered the country and occupied Macedonia.

Bulgarian language was introduced into schools and churches in Macedonia and new Bulgarian speaking cultural institutions were built. In June 1942 new citizenship legislation was passed. According to the law Bulgarian citizenship was offered to all people of Bulgarian descent living in Vardar or Aegean Macedonia. The Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia was the biggest challenge faced by the Bulgarian communists in relation to the Macedonian question in the pre-communist period. They had to deal with two complicated questions: how was the resistance in Macedonia to be organised and what should their relationship with the Yugoslav resistance movement (*“partisans”*) be in Macedonia?

Formally Bulgaria was in the role of an occupier of Macedonia, controlled by Germany. Yet the meaning of the occupation ran very deep in the Bulgarian mind. The Macedonian

²⁸ The Axis Powers was the coalition headed by Germany, Italy, and Japan that opposed the Allied Powers in World War II. The alliance originated in a series of agreements between Germany and Italy, followed by the proclamation of an 'axis' binding Rome and Berlin (Oct. 25, 1936) and then by the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact against the Soviet Union (Nov. 25, 1936). The connection was strengthened by a full military and political alliance between Germany and Italy (the Pact of Steel, May 22, 1939), and the Tripartite Pact signed by all three powers on Sept. 27, 1940.

occupation was seen as a great step forward towards the fulfilment of the Bulgarian national dream, unification with Macedonia. Here lay the communists' anxiety about opposing the Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia. Any communist anti-Bulgarian activities in Macedonia could alienate them from the ground support they needed. No section of the Bulgarian population which would support such activities. The people of Macedonian origin who were refugees in Bulgaria from the Balkan wars and the First World War were also encouraged to settle in the occupied lands and their biggest hope was that Macedonia would remain Bulgarian. Yet Bulgarian communists had to co-operate with the Yugoslav communists, who saw them as supporters of Bulgarian nationalism in Macedonia. The BCP tried to portray the communist resistance in Macedonia as an anti-fascist movement, opposing the tsarist Bulgarian regime but not everything Bulgarian. In contrast the Yugoslav communist party, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), thought that the resistance in Macedonia was an armed struggle against the entire Bulgarian presence, which dominated Macedonia since the occupation. Josip Broz Tito, the leader of the Yugoslav partisans, advocated resistance to the Germans as well as to the Bulgarian administration in Macedonia.²⁹ Thus BCP and the LCY had conflicting views on the very essence of the communist resistance in Macedonia. The disagreements became the major source of contention between the two communist parties. The BCP called for 'one territory - one party'. This practically meant that control had to be in their own hands. Todor Pavlov, the prominent ideologist of the Bulgarian communists, who was from Macedonia himself, issued a letter denying that Macedonians were separate people.³⁰

²⁹ See Walter R. Roberts, Tito, Mihailovic and the Allies, 1941-1945, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987).

³⁰ See Pero Korovar and Orde Ivanovski (eds.), Filip Korzenski (tr.), The Historical Truth: The Progressive Social Circles in Bulgaria and Pirin Macedonia on the

Thus the Bulgarian communists found it impossible to distance themselves from the issues of nationalism in relation to Macedonia. They tried to balance the call for a united 'anti-fascist' struggle against the Bulgarian state with the overwhelming Bulgarian desire to see Macedonia included into Bulgaria. But the result was a major confusion within the communist movement. The BCP was caught in the conundrum of the general difficulty in reconciling national aspirations and internationalist communist ideals.

The Yugoslav communists tackled the problem in a different manner. They were clear that the Macedonian communist movement must remain loyal to the Yugoslav leadership and refuse to obey the BCP. They were also clear that any help to the Bulgarian comrades could play in the hands of the Bulgarian nationalist aspirations towards Macedonia. The Bulgarian-Yugoslav controversies were highlighted when it had to be decided who was to lead the communist movement in Macedonia. The head of the Macedonian Communist Party from 1940 until 1941 was Metodi Shatarov-Sharlo, who was close to the Bulgarians and spoke about 'free Soviet Macedonia'. The Yugoslav communists, aware of the close ties between the Bulgarian and Soviet communists, were not happy with this idea. Indeed Shatariv-Sharlo's orientation suited the pro-Soviet policy of the Bulgarian communists, who read 'Soviet Macedonia' as 'Soviet Bulgaria'. But the Soviet concern was not how to please the Bulgarian communists, but rather how to retain control over both the Bulgarian and the Yugoslav communist parties. Moscow acted as an arbiter in the dispute between the Bulgarian and Yugoslav communists over Shatarov-Sharlo and decided that he was not suitable to lead the Macedonian communists. They approved of his expulsion from Macedonia on the grounds of

Macedonian National Question. Documents, Studies, Resolutions, Appeals and Published Articles, (Skopje: Kultura, 1983).

mishandling the political situation there. Consequently the Bulgarian and Yugoslav communists jointly condemned him. Moscow and Bulgaria accepted the Yugoslav approach, subjecting him to severe party criticism, but sparing his life as well as his name - he was not labelled a class enemy.³¹ The leadership of Tito was decisive in the dispute. During the Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia Moscow favoured Tito because he organised an armed struggle against the Germans, whereas Bulgarian communists hardly participated in armed resistance. Tito was in charge of the Macedonian leadership and gradually reduced the Bulgarian influence over the Macedonian communists to a minimum. At the end of 1942 Tito decided to send one of his best aides to take over the military and political activities in the Macedonian communist movement. Svetozar Vukmanovic-Tempo, a Montenegrin, shared Tito's beliefs that Macedonia should engage in active resistance. Tito was a different type of communist leader compared to the Bulgarians. Unlike Dimitrov and Kolarov, Tito did not rely on the Soviets to solve the Yugoslav national questions. He had his own ideas. This gave him the opportunity to act much more independently when it came to the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute over Macedonia.

Meanwhile the Soviets continued to envision Macedonia as a united republic and part of some kind of a Balkan federative structure, designed after the model of the Soviet republics. Effectively this meant that according to the Soviets any future Macedonian republic should be placed under Soviet auspices. But the Comintern by and large also thought that the part of Macedonia which was in Bulgaria (Pirin Macedonia) would have to be united with the future Macedonian republic. As Clissold concluded, the thinking behind Moscow's policy on Macedonia was as follows: 'Bulgarian people were staunchly pro-Russian. They would let themselves be guided by what Moscow thought good for

³¹ See Tsola Dragoicheva, *Takava e istinata*, (Sofia: Partizdat, 1981).

them. And if there was any opposition ... from the Macedonian emigrant residents in Bulgaria who were a large and influential body bitterly opposed to any abandonment by Bulgaria of her Macedonian provinces...Bulgaria could always be reminded that she was in the position of an ex-Axis satellite and must bear the consequences.’³²

The Soviet position on the Macedonian question was ambivalent and totally politicised. When the Soviet policy was to distance itself from the Yugoslav state in the interwar years, the Comintern encouraged Macedonian separatism. After the invasion of the Axis in Yugoslavia in 1941, it appeared that the Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia may be accepted as definite. It also looked as if the Soviets approved of the Bulgarian communists’ control of the Macedonian communists as long as it complied with their orders. In less than a year though, when the Yugoslav partisan movement gained momentum, the Comintern decided that the Macedonian communists should be controlled by the Yugoslav communist leadership alone. Without the support of the Soviets, Bulgarian communists seemed lost and incapable of making any decisions.

At the same time the Comintern’s directive was for both parties to support the idea of self-determination of the Macedonian people: ‘Macedonia should remain with Yugoslavia on the grounds of practicality and expediency...the Bulgarian communist party members who find themselves on Yugoslav territory should co-operate and give all possible help to Yugoslavia, and both parties should adopt an attitude in favour of self-determination for the Macedonian people’.³³ Supporting Macedonian self-determination must have

³² Stephen Clissold, Whirlwind: An account of Marshal Tito’s Rise to Power, (London: The Cresset Press, 1969), p.146.

³³ Stephen Clissold (ed.), Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union 1939-1973: A Documentary Survey, (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 153.

seemed the last option left for the Bulgarian communists, who so much counted on the Soviets to help them solve their most important national question. But Moscow used the disagreements between the Yugoslavs and the Bulgarians whenever it was necessary to confront disobedience from its Bulgarian protégé. The friction between them over the partisan tactics in Macedonia and the future status of Pirin Macedonia remained explosive. Although the Comintern acted hesitantly, trying to keep both sides under control, Tito was favoured in relation to Macedonia. In theory the Comintern's position was 'the Balkans for the Balkan peoples' and 'Macedonia for the Macedonians', but in reality they wanted to satisfy Yugoslav demands as an award for their strong opposition to the Germans.

By 1943 the success of Tito's resistance cost the Bulgarian communists their initiative in the Macedonian affairs. The Bulgarian communists' confidence was badly undermined. As Oren wrote: 'From that point on, the Bulgarian Communists, who had hitherto thought themselves as unequalled by their Balkan counterparts found themselves in a secondary position'.³⁴ This was a big blow to the Bulgarian communists, who had hoped to acquire the image of national saviours.

³⁴ Nissan Oren, Bulgarian Communism: The Road to Power 1934-1944, (East European Studies and of Columbia University and Research Institute of Communist Affairs, Columbia University), (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 199.

X. The Failure of Bulgaria's Macedonian Policy

At the beginning of the occupation many people in Macedonia met the Bulgarians enthusiastically as liberators. But because of their assimilative policy this image was soon transformed and they were seen as conquerors. As a result, the occupation of Macedonia, for which the Bulgarians so long dreamed, succeeded mainly in creating hostility towards them. The Bulgarian administration forced Bulgarian identity on the Macedonians and tried to eliminate any different perceptions of ethnicity or culture among the population. All public affairs were supposed to be conducted in Bulgarian language and everyone was supposed to assert his or her Bulgarian nationality. All educational, cultural and social institutions were transformed according to Bulgarian instructions. Yet Macedonians were not united in their response to the Bulgarian policy. Some people welcomed the Bulgarians, but others saw the Bulgarians as new rulers of Macedonia who would merely substitute Serbian dominance for Bulgarian. The disappointment with the Bulgarian policy fed into the rise of Macedonian nationalism with its claim that Macedonia is Macedonian only. It became increasingly apparent that from this point onwards that Macedonian nationalism was to be the main contestant of the idea that Macedonia was Bulgarian.

The Bulgarian administration did not have any particular policy towards the numerous minorities living in Macedonia, including Albanians, Serbs, Vlachs, Turks, Jews, Gypsies and others. The Bulgarian idea of Macedonia seemed blind to the ethnic diversity of the country. This was so partly because the biggest minority in Macedonia, the Albanians, were concentrated in the Italian-occupied territories of Macedonia during the war. But the Bulgarian administration did not provide any arrangements for those members of ethnic minorities living under Bulgarian occupation. The Jews paid the price of the

highest order for this policy, when the Bulgarian administration, under the Nazi orders, deported them to death camps, stripped of their previous Yugoslav or other citizenship.³⁵

The Bulgarian communist strategy during the occupation of Macedonia was to rely on the Soviet policy and hope that it could be squared with Bulgarian national ambitions. But the lack of a strong Bulgarian-led partisan movement in Macedonia, as well as in Bulgaria proper, undermined the position of the BCP in the eyes of the Soviets, particularly when compared to their Yugoslav comrades. In the end, the Bulgarian communists lost their influence in Macedonia and the Macedonian communist movement became closely associated with the Yugoslav partisans. This development during the course of the war led Macedonia to become a part of the new Yugoslav federation established in 1945 under the leadership of Tito. The People's Republic of Macedonia was legitimated as a constituent part of the new Yugoslav communist state.

Did Bulgarian communists gave up completely on the Macedonian question? Did communist Bulgaria accept that as painful as it was the loss of Macedonia was simply a fact of Bulgarian national history? How was the BCP going to promote Soviet-style internationalism under the new circumstances? The answer to all these questions was complex as under communism Bulgaria was bound to re-experience the Macedonian question.

³⁵ A full account of the Jewish deportations from the Bulgarian occupied territories during the Second World War is presented in chapter 6 of this thesis.

XI. The Macedonian Question during Communism (1944-89)

After the end of the Second World War, the BCP became the new political ruler of Bulgaria. During 45 years of government the BCP could not develop a consistent policy on the Macedonian question. It revised its views several times and accordingly Bulgarian communist policy also changed. The two main factors which dictated the BCP approach to Macedonian issues were the consequences of the split between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1948 and the change in the development of nationalism under communism in Bulgaria as dictated by the BCP. Bulgarian relations with the USSR remained central to the way the BCP conducted all affairs, including the Macedonian question. If Moscow could not tolerate Tito, Bulgaria had to also reconsider its relations with Yugoslavia. And the Macedonian question was at the core of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. Equally important was the fluctuation of the BCP's views on Bulgarian nationalism in relation to the Macedonian question. Although initially the BCP supported the idea that the Macedonian nation existed as a separate entity, from 1948 onwards this was denied. Instead the BCP declared that there was no Macedonian identity in Bulgaria, though there may be one in Yugoslav Macedonia. This was an obvious change in the communist approach, but the BCP decided that such an attitude was useful for two purposes. First, by asserting that Bulgaria has no claims over Macedonian identity in Yugoslavia, communist Bulgaria distanced itself from Yugoslavia. In this way the BCP reassured Moscow that its instructions were being taken seriously. Second, declaring that there was no Macedonian population in Bulgaria was in accord with the growing communist idea of Bulgaria as an ethnically homogenous country. During the same time the BCP encouraged Jewish emigration from Bulgaria (1947-49) and an agreement about Turkish resettlement was under way. However it would be wrong to suggest that the BCP planned the parallel development of these issues

concerning nationalities in Bulgaria. Each national problem was dealt with according to the political circumstances of the moment.

In this sense the BCP followed the direction given by Moscow on the Macedonian question. But the policy also seemed like a good option for Bulgaria at the time. The denial of Macedonian identity in communist Bulgaria was well squared with the project of establishing communist Bulgaria as an ethnic nation-state.

The most crucial development of the Macedonian question in the Balkans since the collapse of the Ottoman empire was the establishment of the People's Republic of Macedonia in Tito's Yugoslavia. The status of the republic was the first step towards a legitimate Macedonian nation and state. A Macedonian identity with its own officially recognised language, culture and institutions was established a separate national identity. Consequently the whole Bulgarian debate about who Macedonia belonged to was transformed into a different question: if there was a Macedonian nation in Yugoslavia, was there a Macedonian national minority in Pirin Macedonia, the Bulgarian part of Macedonia?

In 1946, Georgi Dimitrov, the first communist leader of Bulgaria stated: "The fact has often been disregarded that the majority of the Macedonian people have already been organised in a state and a nation within the framework of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as the People's republic of Macedonia. Using this republic as a basis, the other sections of the Macedonian people will be united to it in the near future, especially Macedonia of the present Pirin region. There are no three Macedonians. There is only one Macedonia and its major part is represented by the established Macedonian People's

republic'.³⁶ Thus Dimitrov agreed with the USSR opinion that Macedonia should ultimately aim towards independence. Further on the old idea of a Balkan communist federation was discussed by Dimitrov, Stalin and Tito.³⁷ But there were many disagreements about the possible structure of such a federation. The main issue was again that Yugoslavia refused to accept the unconditional Soviet control, which the BCP did not even question. The split between Yugoslavia and the Soviets put an end to this debate. Yugoslav and Bulgarian communists also differed over the status of Pirin Macedonia. After the capitulation of Bulgaria at the end of the Second World War, in September 1944, there was a campaign to separate Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria. The Bulgarian communists blocked it successfully with the support of the Soviets, who opposed any separation of Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria. But the compromise was their co-operation in building the Macedonian People's Republic within the Yugoslav federation. In December 1946 the Bulgarian Institute for the Scientific Study of Macedonia, based in Sofia, which disseminated Bulgarian ideas in Macedonia, was closed and its archives transferred to Skopje. This marked formally and highly symbolically the end of the promotion of the Bulgarian identity in post-war Macedonia.

Later, the BCP decided that Macedonian culture should be developed in Pirin Macedonia. In 1948 the Bulgarian government introduced the study of Macedonian language and history in the schools of Pirin Macedonia and many teachers arrived there from Yugoslavia to re-educate the population. This policy was exactly the reverse of the

³⁶ Korovar and Ivanovski, The Historical Truth, p. 171.

³⁷ In 1947 Bulgarian and Yugoslavian communists negotiated an agreement in Bled for abolishing the border in Pirin Macedonia. Teachers in history and language were sent from Yugoslav Macedonia to Pirin Macedonia. Macedonian National Theatre was opened in Gorna Djumaja. The newspapers *Nova Macedonia* and *Pirinski Vestnik* were published in the Macedonian language.

one during the occupation of Macedonia, when Bulgarians tried to educate Macedonians into being Bulgarian. Naturally there was confusion among the people of Pirin Macedonia.

Despite the Bulgarian co-operation in the promotion of Macedonian identity, relations between Yugoslav Macedonia and the Bulgarian authorities were tense. Bulgarians often found the presence of Yugoslav Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia arrogant and offensive. Pirin Macedonia became a place for confrontation between the two communist countries. Then Bulgarian communists' attitude was changed again. By the end of the same year of 1948, Bulgarian authorities introduced the opposite policy, now seeking the de-Macedonianisation of the Pirin region. The reasons for this shift in Bulgarian communist policy were rather complex. Shoup suggests the split between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union at that time was a major incentive behind the new Bulgarian policy.³⁸ Crampton however believes that 'the dispute between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia was more complicated than a case of Sofia following Moscow's example'. Crampton argues that Bulgarian communists were not really prepared to alienate Pirin Macedonia, and once Tito and the Yugoslavs were ostracised from the Soviets, 'nationalist interest could again be squared with proletarian internationalism'.³⁹

At the core of the change in Bulgarian policy seems to have been national sentiment about Macedonia, which remained strong among the Bulgarian public as well as among the Bulgarian communists. Although the BCP accepted the existence of Yugoslav

³⁸ Paul S. Shoup, Communism and the Yugoslav National Question, East Central European Studies of Columbia University, (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 155.

³⁹ Crampton, A Short History, pp. 171-172.

Macedonia, the mere thought of recognising Macedonian identity in Bulgaria was not seriously entertained. Indeed the change in the Soviet policy towards Yugoslavia suited the Bulgarian communists only too well. Freed from the responsibility of taking the decision themselves they could enjoy its result, which was to be seen as defenders of the Bulgarian nation. Communists needed to popularise themselves when they were still the new masters of Bulgaria. During these years there was still a segment of Bulgarian political life, which was about opposition and public opinion mattered. In 1946 the remaining active opposition in Bulgaria expressed sharp criticism over ideas of unifying Pirin Macedonia and Yugoslav Macedonia. The Macedonian community in Bulgaria was also still active, particularly in the capital Sofia. It attacked the communist government by saying that the BCP mishandled the whole idea of Macedonian nationality. Besides the Yugoslavs themselves thought that it was too risky to go so far as to claim Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria, which made it easier for the BCP to oppose them. The Soviet split with Yugoslavia gave the BCP the chance to restrict their views over Macedonian issues to Pirin Macedonia. And this seemed better than nothing.

From 1948 onwards any ideas of open co-operation between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were punishable in Bulgaria. The communist world was living under Stalin and any national questions were subject to persecution. The BCP under Dimitrov organised the show trial of Traicho Kostov, a pro-Soviet communist accused of having the wrong policy on the Macedonian question. He was tried and executed in 1948.⁴⁰ His case

⁴⁰See Protsept sreshu Traicho Kostov i negovata grupa, (Sofia: 1949). Traicho Kostov was executed after a staged trial on 17 December 1949. The fifth article of the accusation stated that together with the Yugoslav party leaders, Tito, Kardel, Djilas and Rankovich, he was negotiating: 'common action against the Bulgarian national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence by attaching it to Yugoslavia and, above all by separating

showed that the Macedonian question was very volatile and had a great potential for misuse. Those communists who believed that they could easily combine a nationalist policy over Macedonia with Soviet principles were badly mistaken, for Moscow could change it any time according to its own agenda. In 1948 at its 5th congress, the BCP stated that Pirin Macedonia was Bulgarian. This assertion aimed to reinforce the Bulgarian-Soviet alliance and cut off any possibilities of being accused of Titoism. In 1963 a party plenum decided that the population in Pirin Macedonia does not constitute Macedonian minority.

Pirin region on behalf of Yugoslav Macedonia.’ He was rehabilitated after the April plenum of the BCP in 1956.

XII. Macedonian Censuses in Communist Bulgaria

Bulgarian communist regime considered census statistics important. The number of the Macedonian population in Pirin Macedonia as reflected in the censuses of 1956 and 1965 caused controversies between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The Bulgarian data kept changing correspondingly to the position of the BCP on the existence of Macedonian nationality within Bulgaria. In 1946 there was a census in Bulgaria and it is generally believed that Bulgarian communist authorities pressurised the population of Pirin Macedonia to register as Macedonians. The results were not published by the Bulgarian authorities but Yugoslav sources claim that 252,908 people declared themselves as Macedonians.⁴¹ Although this figure has been disputed since, it has also been established that the census of 1946 registered that more than 70% of the population of Pirin Macedonia declared themselves as Macedonians.⁴² The results of the census were in accord with the recognition of separate Macedonian identity by Bulgarian communists.

The next census was in 1956 and it recorded the figure of 187, 789, which was less than the result of the previous census. This was after BCP started a process of reconsidering its position on the Macedonian question in Bulgaria and moving away from the recognition of a separate Macedonian national identity. The census was taken only months after the April Plenum of 1956 which marked the beginning of the process of de-Stalinization in Bulgaria. The smaller number of Macedonians which was recorded was opposed by Belgrade.

⁴¹ See Hugh Poulton, The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict, (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1993), pp. 106-107.

⁴² See Miliana Kaimakova (ed.), Istoria na Bulgaria, (Sofia:Standart,1999-2000),p. 321.

In assessing the results of the census of 1956 the international relations within the Soviet block should be taken into account. The census was taken just after the first reapproachment between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1955. Until the autumn of 1957 the official course was one of improving the relations between USSR and Yugoslavia. It is highly unlikely that BCP would decide to go against it, which would have been the case if decided to encourage recording of dramatically lower number of Macedonians in Bulgaria. It seems more probable that the 1956 census was conducted without pressure, at least not on the same scale as during the 1946 census to register as Macedonian.

Things have changed though by 1965 when the next census was taken. This time it resulted in a dramatically lower figure compared to the previous two censuses and dropped to 8,750. With this census the BCP asserted its new policy of non-recognition of a separate Macedonian identity in Bulgaria and defended it as a correction of the previous policy for encouraging the population of Pirin Macedonia to register as 'Macedonians'.⁴⁵ The Yugoslavs denounced the results of 1965 census as they appeared threatening to the affirmation of the Macedonian nationality in Yugoslav Macedonia. Most importantly relations between USSR and Yugoslavia once again changed. The reapproachment of 1955 lasted shortly and with the Soviet invasion in Hungary in 1956 and the consequent violation of Hungarian-Yugoslav agreement on the protection of Imre Nagy relations between Belgrade and Moscow were strained, and by the time he was executed in the summer of 1958 Soviet-Yugoslav relations were in serious crisis. Bulgaria must have felt free to exercise its own policy concerning the existence of Macedonian identity as it was unlikely to be categorically sanctioned by Moscow in favour of Belgrade. Until 1965 when the census was taken Bulgaria and Yugoslavia

engaged in exchanging conflicting claims about Macedonian nationality in Bulgaria as well as Bulgarian nationality in Yugoslav Macedonia, but they were limited to 'historical debates'.⁴⁴

It has been a point of dispute who was right in the debate between Yugoslav and Bulgarian communists regarding the reliability of the statistics of 1965. The BCP claimed that the pressure on the population to register as 'Macedonian' was lifted and therefore the data was correct. In support of this claim is the fact that in the last census of the Bulgarian population of 1992 (after the fall of communism) the number 10,800 was close to the one of 1965. Also as King suggests, if in 1965 the BCP wanted to declare that there were no Macedonians in Bulgaria there would have not been any number of Macedonians registered.

It seems certain that pressure for identifying as Macedonian was exerted in 1946 when Macedonian culture was promoted in Pirin Macedonia in accord with the idea of the existence of a separate Macedonain nation promoted by the BCP. But it seems equally probable that in 1965 there was no need to put the same pressure in order to register the majority of the population as Bulgarian. The BCP did not have to exercise pressure on the population in Bulgaria in order to popularise the idea that Macedonians were Bulgarians. It was rather a question of promoting this position inside the BCP in order to gain popularity in the country. For traditionally the majority of the Bulgarian Macedonians considered themselves as being a legitimate part of the Bulgarian nation - as opposed to a minority claiming separate Macedonian identity. This is not to say that the censuses were not politicised. But the BCP policy of recognition of Macedonian

⁴³ See King, *Minorities under Communism*, 1973, p. 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.201.

nationality in Bulgaria until 1948 was exceptional in the history of the Macedonian politics in Bulgaria. It lasted shortly and was denied by the BCP itself.

The result of the first Macedonian census was supposed to implement the instruction given from above, which was to confirm the idea of Macedonian identity in Bulgaria. The following two censuses had the opposite aim. They were supposed to demonstrate that there was no Macedonian identity in Bulgaria in such numbers as to constitute a viable national identity. Thus the censuses also demonstrated graphically the changes in communist policy: people were first made to define themselves as Macedonians, and in a less than a couple of decades, the orders have changed and they were allowed to identify as Bulgarians. This policy intensified people's insecurity about their national identity. Many people of the Pirin Macedonia feared to identify themselves in terms of nationality. They secretly hated the idea that somebody else not only had a definition for them but also kept changing it according to some abstract and invisible regulations.

XIII. The Consolidation of Bulgarian Nationalism under Communism

From the 1960s the communist government in Bulgaria developed a more coherent idea about the national questions and called for a united position among Bulgarian scholars. The aim was to assert that Bulgaria was an ethnically homogenous nation. A number of publications were produced in support of this idea. Some of them were designed to be used as official party documents, but the new party position was disseminated also through history books, new research on the Bulgarian literature and folklore. The most precise description of the BCP policy on the Macedonian question during the 1970s was summarised in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs's declaration, published under the title 'About the Comprehensive development of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations'.⁴⁵ The declaration focused on claims about the existence of Macedonian minority in Bulgaria as well as the establishment of the Yugoslav Macedonian republic. Three basic principles on the Macedonian question were outlined in view of the BCP decisions. First it asserted that the Macedonian question was an internal problem of Bulgarian politics and therefore no one else should interfere in it. This statement was directed towards the LYC as it never missed the chance to publicise its own views on the way Bulgaria was handling the Macedonian question. Second, it claimed that the population in Pirin Macedonia centred around the town of Blagoevgrad, was both historically and at present Bulgarian. Third it declared that the process of the creation of Macedonian nation in Yugoslavia was anti-Bulgarian.

The declaration underlined that the national question had been solved in Bulgaria on the basis of Marxist-Leninist theory and accused the LYC's leadership, as well as the Yugoslav media, of mounting an anti-Bulgarian campaign and undermining the

internationalist thinking of communism. Yugoslavia was also accused of giving prominence to national questions above social issues, which were much more important because they concerned class identity. It asserted that Yugoslav policy was in breach of Leninist principles on the national question. The intense campaign led by the BCP in the Pirin district was declared a result of a long lasting pressure in this period (since the end of the Second World War) for a forced introduction of non-Bulgarian consciousness in the Macedonian region of Bulgaria.⁴⁶ Essentially the document defended the BCP policy, denied any past co-operation between the communist movements in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia over Macedonia, and made it plain, that there was no Macedonian national minority in Bulgaria. These points were also made by a document published by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences called 'The Wholeness of the Bulgarian Language Now and in the Past'.⁴⁷ It explained that there was no Macedonian language because Bulgarian was the original language spoken in the Macedonian lands from times immemorial. The argument was based on the assumption that language affiliation is a given, not a subject to choice and that Bulgaria had one language only in its entire history. Still, the biggest problem remained how to justify the change in BCP policy on Macedonia? The Bulgarian communists fiercely defended themselves and blamed everyone else for Bulgarian failures in Macedonia. During the 1950s many Bulgarian history books asserted that by occupying Macedonia, Bulgaria had no chance to have an independent policy. Being a satellite of Hitler's Germany Bulgaria made mistakes, which otherwise would not have been committed. ⁴⁸ Later the communist historiography blamed the petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, which could not resist the temptations of Bulgarian nationalism and

⁴⁵Za vsestranoto razvitiie na Bulgaro-Yugoslavskite otnoshenia, (Sofia, 1978).

⁴⁶Ibid.,p. 17.

⁴⁷ Quoted from Poulton, Who Are the Macedonians?, p. 116.

⁴⁸ See Kratka Istorija na Bulgaria, (Sofia: 'Nauka I Izkustvo', 1958), pp. 312-317.

nurtured certain illusions about it during the occupation of Macedonia.⁴⁹ Bulgarian communism claimed to have been led by the principles of internationalism by emphasising that all mistakes in the past were committed by the Bulgarian bourgeoisie, which suffered from the excesses of nationalism.⁵⁰ The publication of the memoirs of Tsola Dragoicheva in 1979 was a culmination of the controversies over the BCP's past and present policy over Macedonia. Dragoicheva described the Bulgarian communists as innocent victims in the hands of their Yugoslav brothers, who plotted for dominance in Macedonia. She underlined that the population in Pirin Macedonia was Bulgarian by character.⁵¹

At the same time Bulgarian folklorists and ethnographers sought to prove the ethnic Bulgarian character of Macedonian culture past and present. Most of the research was carried out by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The emphasis was on the scientific evidence collected in Pirin Macedonia. Todor Iv. Zhivkov, the head of the Institute of Folklore Studies, asserted that each nation had its own ethnic history and culture which was inherited, not created. He claimed that the oral, written and musical tradition in Pirin Macedonia was wholesome Bulgarian culture, though he did not say explicitly that

⁴⁹ See D.Kosev, Hr. Hristov and D. Angelov, Kratka Istorija na Bulgaria, 2nd ed., (Sofia, Nauka i Izkustvo, 1966), p.276.

⁵⁰ See Alexander Fol, Vasil Guzelev, Nikolai Genchev, Konstantin Kosev, Ilcho Dimitrov, Andrei Pantev, Milcho Lalkov and Kostadin Petrov, Kratka istorija na Bulgaria, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo Nauka i Izkustvo, 1981), pp.380-381.

⁵¹ See Tsola Dragoicheva, Iz moite spomeni: Na klasovi internatsionalisticheski pozitsii, (Sofia: Partizdat, 1979). Dragoicheva was a member of the central Committee of the BCP since 1966. In her book she explained that the BCP made mistakes over the Macedonian policy under the pressure of the YCP and blamed Serbian chauvinism.

Macedonia was Bulgarian.⁵² Denying the Yugoslav account of events in Macedonia was also a central task of Bulgarian history, which was mobilised to defend the Bulgarian nation. Bulgarian scholars argued passionately that Macedonia could not claim separate ethnicity and that prior the Second World War there was no Macedonian nation.⁵³

By the end of the 1970s BCP made it clear that the Macedonian question in Bulgaria was solved by the proclamation that communist Bulgaria was a one nation-state with no ethnic diversity. The national questions in communist Eastern Europe were on the rise and Bulgaria was no exception. During this time most countries of the Soviet bloc had already exposed dissatisfaction with Moscow. The Hungarian events of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968, the rejection of the Sovietisation by the Romanians after 1968, the break-up between Albania and the Soviet Union in 1961 - these were all acts of disagreement with Soviet policy. Yugoslavia kept its distance from the Soviet Union but experienced the first serious nationalist dissent during the 'Croatian spring' movement in 1972. Bulgaria was the communist state most loyal to the Soviets and because of the hostility between the USSR and Yugoslavia, the feeling was that it could afford to take a firmer stand on the Bulgarian aspect of the Macedonian question with no particularly unfavourable consequences. There would be no 'Bulgarian spring.' Moreover no one knew what the Soviet leadership really thought about the Macedonian question. The definitions of national culture under communism repeated the Stalinist slogan 'national in form, socialist in content'. But Breznev's doctrine from 1968 for 'socialist self-

⁵² See Todor Iv. Zhivkov, Introduction. Edinstvo na bulgarskata folklorna traditsia. By Todor Iv. Zhivkov, Dimtrina Mitseva, Evgenia Stoikova, Stefana Ianeva (eds.), (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Academia na Naukite, 1981), p. 17.

⁵³ See M. Voinov, L. Panaiotov, D. Kosev and D. Hristov (eds.), Dokumenti i Materiali za Istoriatata na Bulgarskia Narod, (Sofia: Bulgarska Academia na Naukite: Institut za Istorija, 1969).

determination' showed clearly that the Soviet authorities were not going to tolerate independent national modifications of communism as attempted by Hungary or Czechoslovakia. Therefore with no risk of going against the 'big brother', Bulgarian communism succeeded in promoting ethnic Bulgarian nationalism, which relentlessly revised the Macedonian question.

XIV. The Macedonian-Bulgarian Language Dispute

The question of a Macedonian language was a major issue to which communist Bulgaria had to respond since the establishment of the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia. Again the BCP had an ambiguous policy. The main line of communist Bulgaria was never to deny openly the existence of the Macedonian language. At the same time the emphasis was on the idea that there was only one Bulgarian language. The underlying message was that even if Macedonian was a separate language, this had nothing to do with Bulgaria itself. The position towards the Macedonian language was based on the same premise as the position towards the Macedonian nation in Yugoslavia: it may be that there was Macedonian language in Yugoslav Macedonia, but this had nothing to do with the Macedonian question in Bulgaria. The BCP did not deny that people in Yugoslav Macedonia spoke Macedonian language. But it also insisted that Bulgarian was the historic language of Macedonia. The biggest concern of communist Bulgaria was that if there was a Macedonian language there, it would open the question of the language in Pirin Macedonia. On this issue the BCP was firm that there was only one Bulgarian language spoken in communist Bulgaria: Bulgarian. Thus the language issue remained a mute point in Bulgarian-Macedonian communist politics. The dispute consisted of several aspects. The starting point was that Bulgarian nationhood has been traditionally connected to language. Language has been an inseparable part of the Bulgarian national identity. From the language point of view the Macedonian question in Bulgaria was not only about the territorial unity of Bulgaria but also about the linguistic integrity of the Bulgarian nation.

The Bulgarian-Macedonian language dispute therefore ran deeper than the purely linguistic debate, which was more or less freely discussed in communist Bulgaria. The

Macedonian language question in Bulgaria was also about: (a) defining language as an exclusive national identification, which led to the denial of the existence of the Macedonian language in Bulgaria, (b) understanding the establishment of the official Macedonian language as an attempt to steal from the national Bulgarian history, and (c) insisting that Bulgarian linguistic unity was untouchable.

The theory about the origins of the Bulgarian language was supposed to be the best evidence of Bulgarian linguistic unity. This theory was closely linked to the myth of the civilising mission of the Bulgarian people. Bulgarian language was upheld as the language of Slav civilisation. Inquiring into the ethnic background of the creators of the Cyrillic alphabet, the brothers St. Cyril and St. Methodius, as well as underlying the antique character of the historic, religious, folk and secular Bulgarian language literature in the Middle Ages and during the Bulgarian Revival, were used as arguments in support of this theory. Communist Bulgaria claimed that the creators of Bulgarian literacy may have been of a Slav background, but nevertheless they were major heroes of Bulgarian nationhood.

On the contrary in Yugoslav Macedonia the same personalities were considered heroes of Macedonian culture, understood as a separate entity. In Yugoslav Macedonia, the Macedonian language was legitimised as a separate one by the formal Macedonian alphabet which was officially accepted in 1945. It was based on the spoken dialects of Bitola and Veles, which were close to the Bulgarian language but as the Bulgarian was based on eastern dialects of the country, there was enough differentiation for the Macedonians to claim that it was a language distinct from Bulgarian.

Yet there were inconsistencies in the Bulgarian communist policy on the Macedonian language question. Under Dimitrov (1944-48) communist Bulgaria officially recognised the Macedonian nation with its own language. The recognition was in accord with the Soviet policy of 'Macedonia for the Macedonians', which lasted until the split between Tito and Stalin in 1948. Once the Soviet policy changed, Bulgarian communists altered their position and bitterly disputed the existence of the Macedonian language. The communist policy towards the Macedonian language had the support of the Bulgarian intellectual elite. Also the majority of the people in Bulgaria believed that there was no separate Macedonian language. The linguistic differences were explained mainly as a Serbian influence imposed on Macedonia.

The argument that the Bulgarian and Macedonian languages were the same encouraged the belief that the people were also the same and of the same nationality. The understanding was that members of a particular ethnic group dress and eat in similar ways and speak the same language. This argument over Bulgarian language unity ignored the fact that Bulgarians and Macedonians were living in different states and under quite different political systems, though within the general framework of the communist ideology. Although in theory Bulgarian communism underlined political consciousness as the essence of socialist Bulgarian identity, in practice identity was defined in cultural terms of history and memory. In Bulgaria the process of building a Macedonian literary language was most often referred to as something negative, dangerous, wrong, unjust and most importantly illegitimate. In contrast, in Macedonia, the language was seen as an inseparable part of Macedonian nationhood. Bulgaria thought of the Macedonian language as an invention, whereas in Macedonia it was perceived as a reconstruction of the Macedonian ethnic core and a national integrative force. Thus the two views

constructed conflicting national histories in both countries, which refused to accept that a common past can be transformed into a separate future.

XV. Conclusion

After 1948 Bulgarian communism offered ethnic Bulgarian identity to everyone in the country, including the people of Pirin Macedonia. This seemed permitted by Soviets and in agreement with the views of the ethnic Bulgarian majority in the country. In relation to the Macedonian question, Bulgarian identity under communism was defined in ethnic terms. Yet at the same time Bulgarian communist identity had to declare loyalty first to the Soviet Union. Some people accepted this formula, but for the majority of Bulgarians it was simply an ideological construct, which had very little to do with real life. The communists' flirtation with the idea of accepting the existence of a separate Macedonian identity in Bulgaria lasted briefly, but officially Yugoslav Macedonia was not denied by the Bulgarian communist state. The conflict between Yugoslavia and the USSR helped Bulgaria find a temporary solution to the Macedonian question. The Macedonian question was restricted to issues of Bulgarian nationalism, in an effort to ignore developments in Macedonia. It was somehow frozen, not forgotten but rather forbidden. There were hardly any newspapers and almost no other printed sources of information from Yugoslav Macedonia available in Bulgaria. Travelling from Bulgaria to Macedonia was highly restricted and heavily controlled by the Bulgarian authorities.

One of the side effects of the communist policy on the Macedonian question was that many people in Pirin Macedonia felt they were being compensated for the lack free choice of their national identity with second hand 'Macedonian' things. For instance the annual folk festival 'Singing Pirin' (*Pirin pee*) as well as the numerous government initiatives to improve life in the region were felt as a deliberate policy for satisfying the population. Yet no material benefits succeeded in keeping some people away from the idea that beyond the border there was 'another' Macedonian life. Thus Macedonian

identity was loaded with mythical attraction - over there, the 'real' Macedonian life as opposed to the one here in Bulgaria. The fear of being punished for identifying as Macedonian in Bulgaria also had an ambivalent impact. Some people felt silenced. But many others became very attached to their own ethnic definition. As Connor argues on the effects of similar policies towards national identity : 'In some cases they threatened people but in others they nurtured the weed they intended to root out.'⁵⁴ However there was no organised Macedonian movement in Bulgaria under communism based on demand for Macedonian identity to be recognised as different from the Bulgarian one. There were individuals only who desired to live in Yugoslav Macedonia as Macedonians. Some Macedonians from Bulgaria could resettle in Yugoslav Macedonia on the basis of family relations. There are no statistics available about them, but it is known that the Bulgarian state issued individual permissions. Another option was to apply for political asylum in Yugoslavia as a member of persecuted ethnic minority in Bulgaria.

The BCP's conduct of the Macedonian question also affected Bulgarian relations with its neighbours. The Soviet anxiety over Yugoslavia was so serious that Bulgaria was permitted to develop some relations with Greece and Turkey, but not with Yugoslavia. In the early 1960s some openings were allowed. In 1962, the Bulgarian communist leader Todor Zhivkov made an official visit in Belgrade and in 1965 Tito was welcomed in Sofia. But these occasions did not amount to a full normalisation of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. Communist Bulgaria lived in isolation, dictated by the Soviets and confused by its national problems. The Macedonian question was put on hold.

⁵⁴ Connor, The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory, p. 551.