

## **An Alternative Future for Macedonia**

*By Victor Bivell*

Let's do a thought experiment. One about an alternative future for Macedonia. Let's start by imagining all the people who have left geographic Macedonia since the Ilinden Uprising and the Balkan Wars - say the last 120 years. How many people is that? A million? Could be. More? Could be. If that number is hard to work out, imagine all their children and offspring now living around the world. They are certainly several if not many millions. Many would have parents who were both Macedonian. Many would have one Macedonian parent. Many would have two or one Macedonian grandparent. And so on.

Now the experiment. Imagine that all of the offspring with two Macedonian parents are suddenly living back in their ancestral village or town. Imagine that half the offspring with one Macedonian parent are suddenly living in their ancestral village or town. Imagine that a quarter of the offspring with one Macedonian grandparent are suddenly living back in Macedonia.

Now the interesting part. Imagine the effects that all of these Macedonians would have on Macedonia - the political, economic and social effects in the Republic of Macedonia, in Aegean Macedonia, in Pirin Macedonia, and in Mala Prespa.

There would be too many changes to go into all of them here, so let's just have a quick look at the political effects. In the Republic of Macedonia the Macedonians would be the undisputed majority and issues around Albanian separatism would suddenly end. In Aegean Macedonia the ethnic Macedonians would again be the majority and Greece would need to recognize them and give them the rights they should always have had. In Pirin Macedonia the Macedonians would consolidate their majority position and Bulgaria would need to recognize them and give them all the rights that should never have been taken away. In Mala Prespa there would be enough Macedonians to seriously improve their political standing and lives.

The thought experiment shows that the Macedonian people around the world have the power to bring political stability to the Republic of Macedonia, and it shows that the Macedonian people have the power to make Greece and Bulgaria recognize the ethnic Macedonians in their borders and give them full recognition and human rights.

Let's move from experiment to reality. Although not all of these offspring are suddenly going to move to Macedonia, the good news is that not all of them need to. The positive changes can start and happen even if only a small number, a small percentage, move back. The key change needed is to reverse the trend of Macedonians leaving Macedonia so that more people move back than move out. With that simple change, time will be on Macedonia's side. It will then only be a question of how much time before Macedonians achieve a secure homeland, win all the rights they deserve, and live in political peace.

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