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Echoes from the Past: Greece and the Macedonian Controversy

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One direct result of the revolutionary changes in the political and social system of the East European countries since 1989 has been a revival of forgotten nationalist dreams and territorial claims. These developments have turned the Balkans into a disaster area, fully justifying the region's old nickname of 'the powder-keg of Europe'. No sooner did one of the basic factors of post-war stability, the USSR, begin to totter, as revolutionary changes shattered its socio-political foundations, than a chain reaction of forces was initiated in Eastern Europe. The immediate outcome has been an endeavour to establish a new status quo - not, usually, by peaceful means.

Those who are familiar with the situation in the Balkans are well aware that the harsh nationalist and religious strife which at present is ripping apart the once united Yugoslavia is nothing new. It existed in latent form even before the Second World War ended. But the communist regime covered it over with a thin veneer and relegated it to the margins of history.

After Yugoslavia's federal structure collapsed, Europe was shocked by the civil conflict that suddenly convulsed the former union. From mid-1990 onwards, one republic after another began to demand and consolidate its independence, and was sucked into the maelstrom of war: Slovenia first of all, followed by Croatia, and then Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) is a special case. It has escaped war so far, but in September 1991 it began in its turn to demand independence and international recognition. As a direct consequence, the so-called Macedonian Question flared up again. It is an issue that has produced many moments of tension, and has always been at the hub of the political and social agitation and diverse realignments on the map of the Balkans.¹

THE BASIC PARAMETERS OF THE MACEDONIAN QUESTION

After the peace treaty was signed at Bucharest in 1913, the broader geographical area of Macedonia became directly linked with the course of events in the nation states of Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and, later, Albania. From this point onwards it was to be a source of discord, the arena in which the national dreams of the Balkan countries collided. Macedonia's crucial geopolitical position and the ethnic mix of its population (a result of some five hundred years of subjugation to the Ottoman Empire) are the main reasons why the whole issue is so complex. They are also the basic resultant of the national claims of the Balkan peoples, and the conflicting interests of the Great Powers. Early in the nineteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire was beginning to decline and the Balkan Christians' efforts to create and expand their own nation states were at their height, the Macedonian Question was a constant factor in the ethnic and military confrontations in the sensitive area of south-eastern Europe.

For scientific observers and world opinion, particularly in the West, many aspects of Balkan politics remain incomprehensible. This is clearly illustrated by the general reaction to Greece's insistence that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia change its chosen name. Such an unprecedented demand and the discussion surrounding it strike West European ears as preposterous to the point of absurdity.² The spirit of the modern age dictates that if one wants to be a realist in the twentieth century, one must conduct oneself with an eye to the economy, or at least try to legitimize one's stance on the basis of economic factors. The nationalist aspect of the self determination of a national and cultural entity is regarded as a feature of the last century.³

Events in former Yugoslavia, however, daily underline the fact that if one is living in this southern part of Europe one is obliged to take all such 'outdated' notions and aspirations into account. The history of the Balkans is primarily the history of the peoples who have inhabited the region for centuries, and their nation states complete the image of the peninsula through their continual disputes and conflicts, in their efforts to achieve national integration each in accordance with its own perceptions and ideals. The Balkan mind sees nothing strange in dreams of yesteryear. Particularly for someone who was born when the present state of affairs in former Yugoslavia was not even a speck on the horizon, it is even more difficult to rise above nationalistic ideology.

One fact, the fundamental parameter of the Macedonian Question, which must be stressed above all others, is that the word 'Macedonian' is an adjectival adjunct, which in ancient Greek denoted a plains-dweller.⁴ It has always signified a purely geographical provenance. Furthermore, after the

ancient Macedonian kingdom of Philip and Alexander had been overthrown, and particularly after Slavonic tribes had arrived and settled on the Balkan Peninsula in the seventh century AD, neither an independent and sovereign Macedonian state nor any such concept as Macedonian nationality ever existed, until the end of the Second World War. It was in the twentieth century that all this took on a new dimension, through the catalytic presence and influence of communist ideology in the Balkans.

A HISTORICAL REVIEW

The Balkan countries and Turkish-held Macedonia (1870-1919)

The Macedonian Question essentially came into being in the nineteenth century. The whole region of Macedonia was under Ottoman occupation at that time and it was a century convulsed by national uprisings. The Christian peoples of the Balkans were trying to achieve a national renaissance and were breaking away from the decaying Ottoman Empire. Towards the end of the nineteenth century there began a keen race between Greeks and Slavs over who would succeed the Ottomans in Macedonia. The population of the region at this time was approximately one third Muslim and two thirds Christian. The Christians were more or less united until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Ottomans began deliberate efforts to sunder them. In 1870, the Sultan recognized the Bulgarian Church's independence from the Oecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and this, together with the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-8, enabled the victorious Russia to force the Sultan to accept, under the Treaty of San Stefano (3 March 1878), an independent Great Bulgaria. It included most of Macedonia and Thrace and had a catalytic effect on the further evolution of the Macedonian Question.

These unexpected developments provoked an immediate reaction from the other Great Powers, which eventually managed to impose a new settlement of the Eastern Question at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. The Treaty of San Stefano was revoked and two Bulgarian states came into being: the southern part of Great Bulgaria was detached and renamed as the autonomous province of 'Eastern Rumelia', still subject to the Sultan. The geographical area of Macedonia also remained a province of the Ottoman Empire until 1913. San Stefano was henceforth to embody the great dream of Bulgarian nationalism; and the warring Bulgarians, Greeks, and Serbs were now engaged in an ongoing nationalist and religious struggle to achieve ethnic and cultural homogeneity in Macedonia.⁵

At the end of the nineteenth century, the whole of geographical Macedonia formed three horizontal linguistic zones. The north zone, which now corresponds to two-thirds of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

and half of Bulgaria's Pirin Macedonia, was densely populated by speakers of Slavonic, mostly Bulgarian. The south zone, which now comprises two-thirds of the Greek part of Macedonia, had a dense Greek-speaking population. The zone in between was inhabited by a mixture of Slavonic-, Vlach-, Greek-, and Albanian-speakers. As far as Greece's national idea was concerned, the south and middle zones corresponded historically to the Macedonian kingdom of antiquity, which, together with their ethnic composition, bolstered Greek hopes to have them incorporated into the Greek state.

The Bulgarians in their turn wanted to exploit the dense presence of Slavonic-speakers all over Macedonia to support their own irredentist aspirations in the region. A leading part in achieving their national goals was to be played by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO);⁶ and the Bulgarian presence and influence throughout Macedonia, particularly in the controversial middle linguistic zone, was considerably strengthened by means of education and the Exarchal Church. This combination was regarded as the best counterweight to the Greek Patriarchal influence in the region, in an effort to offset the losses inflicted by the Treaty of Berlin. The chief aim of the Bulgarian strategy was to awaken the notion of self-defence in the Bulgarian-speaking population of Macedonia and Thrace, which would urge them to demand and achieve a degree of political autonomy within the Ottoman Empire; subsequently they could be annexed by Bulgaria.

To begin with, the Bulgarians' activity was strongly anti-Turkish in tone, and it culminated in the Ilinden uprising of 1903.⁷ Though short-lived, this minor revolt provoked the Turks into massacring a considerable proportion of Macedonia's Slavonic-speaking population. The confrontation subsequently developed into an undeclared Greek-Bulgarian war lasting until 1908, at which point the Greek government decided to help the enslaved Macedonian Greeks to resist both their Turkish conquerors and the activities of the Bulgarian revolutionary organizations. Spiritually united with their fellows in Macedonia, the people of metropolitan Greece managed to prevent Macedonia's capitulation to Bulgarian influence. An important part was also played by the revolution of the Young Turks (1908), whose messages of legal and civil equality for all the Empire's subjects helped to bring the four-year guerrilla war in Macedonia to an end. Although a significant proportion of the local population did not speak Greek, they were strongly committed to the Oecumenical Patriarchate and to Greek ideology, and this proved favourable for the ultimate fate of the Greeks in the region.⁸

While the rivalry between Greeks and Bulgarians was raging in Macedonia, a number of attempts were made to draw up a statistical record of the ethnic composition of the local population. It cannot be denied that both the methods used and the criteria on which they were based were designed to serve the national ends of the interested parties. The Bulgarians

tended to take spoken language as their criterion, while the Greeks focused on national consciousness or ecclesiastical adherence (Patriarchal or Exarchal). Perhaps the most objective census was carried out by Hilmi Pasha in 1904 for the Ottoman authorities.⁹

Vilayet of Thessaloniki	Greeks 373,227	Bulgarians	207,317
Vilayet of Monastir	Greeks 261,283	Bulgarians	178,412
Vilayet of Kosovo (Skopje)	Greeks 13,452	Bulgarians	172,005

After the Balkan Wars, the area of Macedonia awarded to Greece (34,603 sq. km. or 51.57 per cent) included most of the vilayets of Thessaloniki and Monastir, with the exception of a few northern provinces, which now belong to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (25,714 sq. km. or 38.32 per cent) and Bulgaria (Pirin Macedonia, 6,789 sq.km or 10.11 per cent). In fact, the area awarded to Greece corresponds to the 'historical Macedonia' of antiquity, apart from two tiny pockets on the northern border. The movements and exchanges of populations that occurred between 1912 and 1925 had a considerable effect on the region's ultimate ethnic composition.¹⁰ After the Balkan Wars (1912-13) and the First World War, the Greek component of Macedonia's population swelled greatly. Both during the wars, when Greeks and Bulgarians on both sides of the Greek-Bulgarian border relocated of their own accord, and after the Greek-Bulgarian agreement on a mutual exchange of populations in 1919, the Greek part of Macedonia acquired a high degree of ethnic homogeneity.¹¹ The situation was even further clarified after the compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey on the basis of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). This provided for the mass departure of the Muslims and much of the pro-Bulgarian element from Greece and their replacement in Macedonia by Greek refugees from Asia Minor, the Black Sea, Thrace, Bulgaria and Russia. Hence, statistics produced by the League of Nations in 1926¹² showed the Greek element as representing 88.8 per cent of the population of Macedonia, the Slavonic- and Bulgarian-speaking element as 5.1 per cent, with the remainder being made up chiefly of Muslims and Jews.

During the inter-war period,¹³ the territory of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia became part of the newly established 'Kingdom of the Serbs, the Croats, and the Slovenes' and in 1918 it was named 'Southern Serbia'. Subsequently, when the Kingdom became 'Yugoslavia' in 1929, Southern Serbia became one of the country's nine *banovine* (provinces), a part of Serbia with a Serbianized Slavonic population. It was now called 'Vardar Banovina', after the River Vardar (Axios in Greek), which flows through Macedonia and into the Gulf of Thessaloniki.

The ethnic character of the Slavonic population of Vardar Banovina during the inter-war years was clearly described in a study conducted by

British scientists for the Foreign Office: 'The Morava valley and much of Macedonia in particular were inhabited by Slavonic populations of an intermediate ethnic character, which could become specifically Bulgarian or non Bulgarian according to whether they were incorporated in a Bulgarian or non-Bulgarian state.'¹⁴

The communist movement and the Macedonian Question (1920-49)

The inter-war period, particularly after the Treaty of Lausanne, saw the start of a new phase in the Macedonian Question. The nationalistic disputes and claims of the interested Balkan countries were further complicated by the admixture of the newly established Balkan communist parties' ideological and class concepts.¹⁵

The Soviet Union and its powerful Communist Party had already emerged onto the world's political scene and had led to the birth of similar movements in the Balkan countries. On the initiative of the Bulgarian Communists, the Balkan Communist Federation (BCF) was established in Sofia in 1920; it was recognized by the Comintern and its members were bound by its decisions.

Bulgarian influence in the BCF was very strong, both because of the history of the Socialist movement in Bulgaria, and because the Bulgarian communists (such as the Secretary, Georgi Dimitrov, for instance, and Vasili Kolarov) wielded enormous power within the Comintern. Between 1922 and 1924, the BCF bowed to Comintern pressure and adopted as its fundamental aim the establishment of 'a united and independent Macedonia and Thrace', which would derive from the union of the three geographical regions of Greek, Yugoslav, and Bulgarian Macedonia. While the communist parties of both Yugoslavia and Greece were obliged to fall in with this decision, they never promoted it with great zeal, and this proved to be a source of friction in the Comintern. In 1934 the Comintern passed a resolution recognizing the existence of a 'separate Macedonian nation'.¹⁶ In 1935, however, when the communist parties were forced to decide how they would oppose the emerging menace of Fascism, the communist parties of Greece and Yugoslavia seized their chance to pull out of the binding decisions made in the 1920s on the Macedonian Question.

The Second World War signalled new and unexpected developments. Bulgaro-Macedonian nationalism flared up once more as Bulgaria occupied the greater part of Yugoslav Macedonia after the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941. The local people hailed the Bulgarian troops as liberators, and in the early days of the occupation pro-Bulgarian feeling ran high.¹⁷ The local communists even preferred to join the party of their Bulgarian 'brothers', rather than the Yugoslav Communist Party. However, the

Bulgarian atmosphere was soon clouded by the high-handedness and misgovernment of the Bulgarian occupation forces, and the local population became increasingly dissatisfied; though this did not mean that they began to question their national consciousness.

Furthermore, Tito's partisan movement, which had already made a very dynamic appearance in the region, was unable to make any progress in Yugoslav Macedonia until the autumn of 1943, when the war began to take an unpromising turn for the Axis powers. It was only then that the Yugoslav Communist Party managed to establish the Communist Party of Macedonia and to organize some degree of resistance there. To counter Bulgarian influence, Tito revived the Comintern's old watchword of a 'separate Macedonian nation', with the aim of liberating all the people of Macedonia through the framework of a united confederation of the south Slavonic peoples, including the Bulgarians.¹⁸

On 29 November 1943, the Anti-fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia met for the second time, in Jaice in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and decided that post-war Yugoslavia would also include Macedonia as one of its federal republics. The Yugoslav communists thus managed to reverse the trend and to force their Bulgarian comrades, who had been handling the Macedonian Question hitherto, to back down considerably and accept Tito's catalytic role as a leader.

On 2 August 1944, the first meeting of the Anti-fascist Council for the National Liberation of Macedonia¹⁹ created the 'People's Republic of Macedonia' in the framework of Yugoslavia's federal structure. This was the cornerstone of Tito's hegemonic plans eventually to annex the administrative areas of neighbouring Greek and Bulgarian Macedonia in the name of international communist solidarity. He even had Stalin's approval, for the Soviet dictator had already implemented a similar policy in 1940, when he had created a separate Moldavian nation to the detriment of Romania.²⁰ Prior to 1944, no historical source and no ethnographical map had ever mentioned the existence of a Macedonian nation. Never before had the present territory of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, either as a state entity or as an administrative unit, borne the name 'Macedonia'. The Yugoslav area of Macedonia was to become the 'Macedonian Piedmont' for the unification of all three parts of geographical Macedonia.

Subsequently, with the civil war raging, the situation in Greece did not develop favourably for the Yugoslav plans. These included the creation of a Slavo-Macedonian 'Popular Liberation Front' and support for the Greek communist partisans. A more dynamic policy was then launched against Bulgaria with the intention of integrating Bulgarian, or Pirin, Macedonia into the People's Republic of Macedonia. By 1946 Yugoslavia had managed to secure a status of cultural autonomy for Pirin Macedonia, with the direct sanction and approval of Stalin. In fact, in August 1946 the Bulgarian

procommunists initially agreed to Macedonian unification, with the People's Republic of Macedonia as the main resultant, as part of federal Yugoslavia. They received in exchange the promise that the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia would support the Bulgarian demand for an outlet to the Aegean at the Paris Peace Conference.²¹

After the Bled accords between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in August 1947, Yugoslav infiltration of Pirin Macedonia was left at the stage already agreed upon, namely that the area would continue to enjoy cultural independence. The Bulgarians gained nothing from Paris, and consequently Pirin's integration into the People's Republic of Macedonia remained a desideratum. It may in fact have been the subject of the secret protocols accompanying the agreement, as may the question of Greek Macedonia; but the relevant sources are not yet available to historians.

Tito's ambitions were beginning to exceed the bounds of communist legitimacy and Stalin was obviously irritated. In February 1948, both the Yugoslav and the Bulgarian communists were summoned to Moscow, where the Soviet leader severely criticized and censured both the proposed federation of southern Slavs and the continuing support for the Greek partisans, for he believed that the communists had already lost the battle in Greece.

The ensuing rupture between Tito and Stalin led to Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform in June 1948, which gave Bulgaria the chance to dissociate itself from the Yugoslav policy on the Macedonian Question. As another result of the new developments, Bulgaria immediately put a stop to Yugoslav-Macedonian cultural infiltration of Pirin Macedonia.

After Greece's civil war ended in 1949, a few dozen Slavonic-speakers (the so-called Macedonians from 'Aegean Macedonia' /'Egejska Makedonija') fled to Yugoslavia and other East European countries. A great wave of emigration to the New World followed, between 1950 and 1970, chiefly from the western part of Greek Macedonia, and in fact it received considerable support from the Greek state. This explains why most of the Slavo-Macedonian and pro-Bulgarian associations in Canada, Australia, and the United States consist of emigres from Greek Macedonia.

The Macedonian Question in its present form (1950-93)

In the early 1950s, Tito's policy focused on two key aims: i) to cultivate and consolidate the 'Macedonian' identity of the population of Yugoslav Macedonia in an effort to foil the rival Bulgarian influence; and ii) to lobby for the rights of so-called 'Macedonian' minorities in the neighbouring countries. In fact, the latter was a fundamental feature of the period when Tito was at the helm of Federal Yugoslavia²²

The keen interest shown both by Belgrade and by the local government in Skopje in the 'Macedonian' minorities in the neighbouring countries led

to much more friction and tension between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria than between Yugoslavia and Greece. Indeed, relations between Belgrade and Athens became considerably more relaxed after Greece, Yugoslavia, and Turkey signed the Balkan Pact of 1953-4, which meant that the West would support Yugoslavia's anti-Soviet policy.

In contrast to the central government in Belgrade, the local leaders of the People's - later Socialist - Republic of Macedonia always maintained a distinctly resentful attitude towards Greece. The Macedonian part of the Greek state had inevitably become the focus of their post-war irredentist dreams. Their efforts consisted in building up all the ingredients of a solid and substantial national ideology, such as historical roots, language and church. At the same time, they also began to swell the arsenal of the 'Macedonian' national ideology with the requisite irredentist aspirations. The latter were a basic component of all Balkan national ideologies after the creation of the nation states in the nineteenth century.²³

The republic's historians²⁴ sought their new 'Macedonian' irredentist dream chiefly in the historical tradition and the cultural identity of their Balkan neighbours, in an attempt to develop a 'Macedonian' consciousness in the country. This they achieved both by appropriating any and every available foreign element they could lay their hands on, and by casting doubt on the provenance of these. However, the historical myth of the unification of the whole of geographical Macedonia was vital if 'Macedonism' was to be noised abroad, particularly in the New World, where there were a great many emigres from the whole of Macedonia.

The theory of a 'Macedonian nation' took on almost psychotic proportions in Tito's Yugoslavia and the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. Both Bulgaria and Greece refused to acknowledge the existence of a separate Macedonian nation. Bulgaria regarded the Republic's local Slavonic population as Bulgarian through and through; and charged that its identity had been deliberately Serbianized in the inter-war period, and that, after the Second World War, it had been instilled with 'Macedonian' ideology on a purely anti-Bulgarian basis. For its own part, Greece rejected the existence and artificial perpetuation of a thirteen-century-old 'Macedonian' nation, because historical sources mention only Bulgarians, or Slavs generally. It was only in the framework of post-war Yugoslavia, under the known socio-political circumstances, that 'Macedonian' ethnicity had been fabricated and encouraged; an ethnicity for 'state and administrative purposes', so to speak. The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina are a similar case: the Croatian Tito's immediate aim was appreciably to reduce the antagonistic Serbs' territorial and political strength by granting certain population groups political autonomy and stressing their ethnic individuality.

The Slavonic-speaking emigres from Macedonia not only accepted 'Macedonian irredentism', but were the basic vehicle by which the concept spread

all over the world. It was chiefly thanks to these Slavonic-speaking communities abroad that world opinion was made aware of the Slavo-Macedonians' irredentist aspirations throughout the period of post-war bipolarity. In the late 1960s, indeed, strong nationalist trends began to emerge, which were often very different from the official ideology of the metropolitan centre, Skopje. This is illustrated, for instance, by the fact that, whereas the Skopje parliament did not adopt the sixteen-rayed sun of Vergina as the emblem of the republic's flag until August 1992, the symbol had already been appropriated and exploited by Australia's Slavo-Macedonian nationalistic circles as long ago as 1983.²⁵

Following the constitutional reforms in Yugoslavia in 1974, Belgrade's grip on the federal republic began to weaken. Skopje immediately started to follow an independent line on the Macedonian Question, which diverged somewhat from Belgrade's official policy. Indeed, the local leaders in Skopje frequently appeared to be sweeping the federal government in Belgrade along the byways of extreme nationalism, so that Yugoslavia's bilateral relations with its Balkan neighbours took a sudden nose-dive. As a result, relations between Belgrade and Sofia were very strained between 1978 and 1982, on account of the Macedonian Question and various issues pertaining to the interpretation of Macedonian historiography.²⁶

Throughout the 1980s, and until Yugoslavia disintegrated in 1991, its federal and local political cadres became dangerously vociferous in their nationalist and irredentist claims against Greece and Bulgaria. International bodies and various scholarly conferences gave Yugoslavia's representatives the chance to accuse their neighbours of violating the human rights of the 'Macedonian minorities' in Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania.

In November 1990 the first free elections were held in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)²⁷. The undisputed winner was the extremist nationalist IMRO-DPMNU (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity). Both its name and its manifesto refer directly to the organisation of the same name that was active at the end of the nineteenth century. Nor is it a coincidence that a report published by the US Department of State in 1991 describes IMRO-DPMNU as a terrorist organization modelling itself on the old IMRo.²⁸ Its main election poster showed the whole of the geographical region of Macedonia, accompanied by the words: 'Take Macedonia's destiny in your hands.' Its Founding Charter of 17 June 1990 explicitly emphasizes 'the need for the Macedonian people's spiritual, political, and economic unification', and states its keen interest in 'those sections of the Macedonian people who are living in servitude in Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Albania'.²⁹ Furthermore, at the close of the party's First National Conference in Prilep (6-7 April 1991), it was resolved that 'the next conference will be held in Thessaloniki'.³⁰

PROPAGANDA AND THE MACEDONIAN QUESTION

Those aspects of the FYROM's policy, both at home and abroad, which lie at the heart of the tensions with Greece, are as follows.

i) The undermining of the history of geographical Macedonia, chiefly by disputing the uninterrupted Hellenic presence and influence in the region. After the official birth of the 'Macedonian state' on 2 August 1944, its intellectual leaders launched a systematic campaign for international recognition of the 'Macedonian nation'. Their aim was twofold: first, to establish the unbroken historical continuity of the 'Macedonian nation' after the first Slavonic tribes appeared in the Macedonian region in the seventh century AD; and second, to cast doubt on or nullify the historical and cultural presence of the neighbouring peoples - the Greeks, the Serbs and the Bulgarians.

Finding themselves unable openly to appropriate the history of ancient Macedonia, the FYROM's historians then resorted to questioning the ancient Macedonians' Hellenic origin.³¹ They maintained that only the ruling class accepted the domination of Hellenic culture and thought, which came from southern Greece. In the course of time, the indigenous population gradually intermingled with the Slavonic tribes that came into the region, and thus created a people of Slavonic origin, which has lived there ever since.

The outdated notion that the Macedonians were not Greek was completely demolished by the archaeological investigations and excavations in and around Vergina in the 1970s and 1980s. The fact that the ancient Macedonians used the Greek language is attested by the vast number of finds from tombs and inscriptions, all of which, without exception, bear only Greek names. One very clear illustration of the continuity of the Greek language over more than twenty-six centuries is given by a ring of the sixth century BC, which was found at Sindos and is now on display in the Archaeological Museum in Thessaloniki. It is inscribed 'ΔΩΠΟΝ' (gift),³² a word that can be seen in any souvenir shop in Greece today. Ever since 1944, when the foundation of the People's Republic of Macedonia added an ethnic and national dimension to the purely geographical term 'Macedonia', Slavo-Macedonian historians have been doing their level best to cloud the whole issue as much as possible.

ii) The systematic cultivation of a spirit of vindication and the consequent promotion by the FYROM of territorial claims against Greece. This policy has been pursued either directly, through official statements by political leaders and declarations by local parties, or indirectly, through the circulation of historical maps of a united Macedonia and the systematic use of Slavonic names for the Greek towns, cities, and villages of northern Greece.

iii) The constant and escalating accusations against Greece of systematic violations of the basic human rights of the so-called 'Macedonian minority' in Aegean Macedonia'. In the case of Greece in particular, the self-styled 'Macedonians' who are demanding their rights so vociferously are a handful of known individuals.³³ It is due, in fact, to the naivety of successive Greek governments that these people have managed every now and then to step into the limelight and denounce to the world the Greek administration and judiciary's policy -against them. Skopje is particularly willing to promote and disseminate their views about 'Macedonian minorities' in the Balkans. It seizes every possible chance to make its views known through international fora (e.g. the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe), scholarly conferences, exhibitions, university circles, the mass media both at home and abroad, newspapers, periodicals, encyclopaedias, and history and geography textbooks.

iv) The periodical appearance and activity of Slavo-Macedonian extremist and paramilitary organisations, which encourage subversive activities against the Greek state through statements, proclamations, calendars, and propaganda leaflets. A typical example is the 'Macedonian National Liberation Army'. It made its appearance in the 1980s, when it began sending autonomist propaganda to the Greek authorities, embassies abroad, newspapers, and private individuals. Its logo is a map of 'Great Macedonia' with Thessaloniki ('Solun') as its capital. The MNLA also uses a picture of Alexander the Great or the above-mentioned map with the Statue of Liberty and an armed 'Macedonian warrior'. Clearly, these phantom freedom fighters make their American origin obvious in order to spread the emotional appeal of Macedonian irredentism to as wide an audience as possible.

Greece and the Macedonian Question

In an effort to secure prospects for lasting peace and cooperation in the wider area of the Balkans, at the meeting of the EC Foreign Ministers on 16 December 1991 Greece laid down three conditions for recognition of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:

- the provision of constitutional and other adequate guarantees that the FYROM has no territorial claims;
- the cessation of all hostile propaganda promoting territorial claims; and
- a change of name to one that carries no implication of territorial claims.

The main indicator of the FYROM's expansionist aims is its 1991 constitution, the preamble to which specifically affirms that it is based upon 'the statehood and legal traditions of the Krushevo Republic [1903] and the historic decisions of the Anti-fascist Assembly of the People's Liberation of

Macedonia [1944]'. It was these decisions that signalled the birth of the People's Republic of Macedonia in the framework of federal Yugoslavia. They specifically proclaim the freedom and the unification of all the 'Macedonian brethren' beyond the artificially created borders of the twentieth century Balkans. If one investigates how the post-war generations in the FYROM have been educated over the past forty-seven years, it is clear that they have grown up and been instilled with the notion that only part of Macedonia has been liberated, the part that comprises the Socialist Republic. The remaining areas in Greece, Bulgaria and Albania are still unredeemed and will have to be liberated at some future date.

Throughout the post-war period, Skopje's leaders have abused the name of Macedonia to an incredible extent. They have seized every possible opportunity to turn it from a simple geographical term into the ethnic definition of a single state - a state whose chief characteristic, be it said, is the catalytic presence of ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities, none of which can be completely identified with Slavonic culture and irredentist ideology. According to the latest census, carried out on 31 March 1991, the republic's second largest ethnic group (the Albanians) accounts for 21.1 per cent of the population, or 427,313 inhabitants out of a total of 2,033,964.³⁴ The Albanians' political leaders, however, vigorously dispute this and claim a figure somewhere between 35 per cent and 40 per cent. Certainly, many Albanians did not take part in the 1991 census.³⁵ The official census figures also include 4.79 per cent Turks, 2.73 per cent Romanians, and 2.17 per cent Serbs. Particularly since the republic of Skopje seceded from Yugoslavia, not only the Albanians, but all the other minority groups as well, have been steadily accusing the state and the administration of systematic discrimination against them.

Through a deliberate confusion of the two meanings - ethnological! historical and geographical! administrative - of the term 'Macedonia', there has been an ongoing attempt for the past fifty years, in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula, to establish and legitimize a policy of arrogating any and every useful historical factor relating to 'Macedonism'. It is done in the name of a people's inalienable right to self-determination and its will to decide its own future.

It is inconceivable to the Greeks that the name of Macedonia should be used exclusively to designate one independent state, whose sovereign rights are confined to a single part of the broader geographical region of Macedonia. Not only would it cause confusion but, above all, the name carries clear implications of historical claims. The territory of the present 'Republic of Macedonia' does not cover the whole of geographical Macedonia; if the republic is nonetheless allowed to monopolize the whole of Macedonia and all things Macedonian, it will become a powerful destabilizing factor in the Balkans.

As a full member of both NATO and the EU, Greece is concerned above all that peace and stability be consolidated in the Balkans with absolute respect for existing national borders, which are guaranteed by international treaties and further protected by the system devised by the CSCE. Greece has repeatedly stated that it has no territorial claims against the FYROM. Indeed, it has promised assistance on several occasions, both on a bilateral level and in the framework of the EU, so long as the republic can make itself politically and economically viable.

The inhabitants of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have the inalienable right to establish their own independent state and to define themselves as they wish. Objectively speaking, Greece is the only power in the region that can be relied upon to give the nascent republic economic and defensive support. Greece has no reason to fear its, undeniably weak, neighbour at the moment, for, alone and armed only with its irredentist dreams, the FYROM can pose no threat to Greece's territorial integrity. But what no one can control or guarantee (and this is precisely where Greece's fears lie) is the possibility that this mini-state may one day be used as a basis for claims against Greece.

After all, the whole region's history is rife with political and military interventions by non-Balkan nations: typical examples are Tsarist Russia in 1878, the Central European powers in 1917-19, the Axis powers in 1941-4, and the Soviet Union in 1946-9. As for the Balkan countries, whose sights have been set on Greece's northern provinces for years, throughout the twentieth century they have exploited the international situation and allied themselves with non-Balkan powers in repeated efforts to achieve their goal. During the First World War, Bulgaria, for instance, tried to annex the Macedonian territory of neighbouring Greece and Serbia on the strength of the Kaiser's expansionist plans, and briefly occupied parts of Greek Macedonia and Thrace. In the Second World War too, Bulgaria allied with Nazi Germany to occupy parts of Greek Macedonia and Thrace again, and also parts of Yugoslav Macedonia. Tito tried to do the same just after the Second World War, with the support of Stalin and the Soviet Union. It is these historical experiences that foster such strong emotions on the Greek side and such fears for the present, and above all the future, of Macedonia and Thrace. The Greeks will not easily forget the traumatic experiences of the twentieth century, when their country was faced so many times with the very real prospect of losing its administrative province of Macedonia. Serious attempts have been made to annex Greek Macedonia to a unified Macedonian state in the framework either of Federal Yugoslavia or of a Balkan Communist Federation under Bulgarian control.

The only precondition laid down by Greece is that the FYROM repudiate the Communist concept of 'Macedonism' and toe the EU line. It would be a dreadful irony if, in the present post-communist era, the

If the FYROM joins and is accepted by the world community under its constitutional name of the 'Republic of Macedonia', the next step will inevitably be the creation of a state entity that is a Macedonian national centre. Its primary concern will then legitimately be to elect itself the protector of the extra-territorial administrative areas of the same name in Greece and Bulgaria. If the inhabitants of Skopje's multi-ethnic republic acquire the right to define themselves as 'Macedonians' in an official context, then the Greek Macedonians will automatically lose their historical right to use the terms 'Macedonian' and 'Macedonia' to define themselves and their own geographical origin. The constitution of the 'Republic of Macedonia' actually provides for just such an eventuality; article 49§1 explicitly states: 'The Republic cares for the status and rights of those persons belonging to the Macedonian people in neighbouring countries.'

As far as the national flag of the 'Republic of Macedonia' is concerned, it consists of the emblem of the ancient Greek Macedonians, the sixteen-rayed sun, on a red field. The emblem was brought to light sixteen years ago during excavations in and around Vergina in Greek Macedonia. Since then the Vergina finds have been displayed in archaeological exhibitions all over the world as an integral part of Greece's cultural heritage. Meanwhile, the Vergina sun itself has already been adopted as a Greek cultural symbol, either as a logo or as a trademark, by countless cultural associations, scholarly institutions, banks and companies both in Greece itself and wherever Greeks live all over the world.

The decision of the FYROM's parliament in August 1992 to put a Greek cultural symbol on this multi-ethnic republic's flag was made in no sudden surge of philhellenic sentiment. Early in 1991, President Kiro Gligorov had stated that his republic laid no claim to ancient Macedonia and the ancient Macedonians; but the new flag starkly vindicated Greece's fears for present and future peace and stability on the Balkan Peninsula. In fact, it might not be very far from the truth to suggest that the FYROM put the Sun of Vergina on its flag quite deliberately in order to have a ready-made 'concession' to hand in future negotiations. To appear to give way on this point would increase the international community's sympathy and admiration for the FYROM's leaders; while the new republic would actually be 'giving back' something which even its own people never really regarded as belonging to them.

Each of these cases constitutes a cultural assault using the skilful ploys of piracy, which prove, to paraphrase a famous Chinese proverb, that 'an emblem speaks a thousand words'. Once the new state achieves recognition under its constitutional name of the 'Republic of Macedonia', it will be able to lay claim to all things Macedonian, including the history and culture of the people in the geographical area of Macedonia; and, what is more, it will be legally entitled to do so.

European Union granted a posteriori historical legitimacy to a communist idea. Furthermore, if the EU and the world community as a whole, through the UN, are anxious to recognize the 'Republic of Macedonia' in order to avert the risk of destabilization, they should be aware of the equally great risk of creating another trouble-spot in Greece. In either case, we must remember that, while voluble denials of territorial claims can be of purely momentary duration, the monopolizing of a name and/or a symbol is a claim that can last for ever.

The political developments that have taken place in relation to the Macedonian Question since 8 April 1993, when the republic joined the UN under the interim name of the 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', have already effected a change of course. In response to obvious pressure by the US and the UN to resolve the dispute over the name, both sides (Greek and 'Macedonian') seem disposed to mend fences on a political level. Nor is it a coincidence that, after two years of vigorous disagreement within the EC/EU over recognition of the FYROM, the confrontation is at a much lower pitch today. This means that a political compromise, at least, over the republic's name and emblem is on the horizon. There are signs that the Greek side's insistence that 'Macedonia' be completely omitted from the republic's eventual official name is growing less categorical as time goes by. Various alternatives are now being presented for consideration, such as 'New Macedonia', 'Upper Macedonia', and 'Slavo-Macedonia'. On the other hand, there is also the possibility that the 'canton' solution will be accepted. The creation, for instance, of two large cantons, a Slavo-Macedonian one (for the 'Macedonian' 64.62 per cent of the population, according to the 1991 census) and an Albanian one, could mark the start of a peaceful coexistence between the republic's minorities. Besides, the Albanians are steadfastly demanding the right to official status in the new republic, something that the preamble to the 1991 constitution does not provide for: 'Macedonia is established as a national state of the Macedonian people, in which full equality as citizens and permanent coexistence with the Macedonian people is provided for Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Romanies, and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia.'

After Skopje joined the UN in April 1993 as the 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', UN-broke red talks began between Skopje and Athens in an effort to get some confidence-building measures off the ground. These concerned the constitution, the flag, security of borders, propaganda, minority issues and of course the former republic's name. The UN Secretary-General appointed Cyrus Vance and Lord David Owen to act as special mediators and made the end of September the deadline for an agreement on all matters under negotiation. According to the, by then outgoing, New Democracy government in Greece, agreements were in fact reached on all issues apart from the name, on which latter point there had

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been considerable progress. Specifically, on 14 May 1993 the mediators had presented Athens and Skopje with a draft proposal that fully covered Greece's demands relating to the borders, the flag, the constitution and the irredentist propaganda, and suggested 'New Macedonia' as an acceptable name.

However, the news that early elections would be held in Greece on 10 October 1993 brought the negotiations to a standstill. And the PASOK victory created an entirely new situation, which essentially ended the talks altogether. The immediate upshot was that, just before Christmas 1993, most of the members of the EU, together with other European countries, unilaterally recognized the FYROM (under that name), leading to considerable friction with the new Greek government. It turns out that this widespread recognition was due to a number of factors, the most important being: the electoral victory of PASOK, which had been a constant target of European criticism in the 1980s too; Greece's impending presidency of the EU; Greece's pro-Serbian stance on the Yugoslav crisis; and the fact that PASOK now manifestly embraced US foreign policy over the Yugoslav crisis in general and the Macedonian Question in particular, in the hope of seeing the latter resolved to Greece's benefit.

Above and beyond the possibility and/or necessity of reaching a political compromise for the sake of peace and stability in the Balkans, the historical background to the Macedonian Question still remains very much open to investigation and will continue to occupy the attention of historians for a long time to come. No international conciliatory or political legitimization of 'Macedonism' can hope to bring about a permanent resolution of the problem. Europe is naturally anxious to minimize all the potential sources of war and ethnic strife on its broader periphery. It does not want anything to undermine its progress towards unification, and is keen to avoid the pressures of the various American interests in Eastern Europe. The conflict between European integration and the larger European nations' strategic and economic interests in the Balkans considerably limits the chances of finding a solution to the specific issue of the Macedonian Question. But this does not mean that Greece's and the other Balkan countries' progress towards Europe should provide an excuse for yet another superficial coverup of the historical dimensions of the Macedonian Question. The conflict between the 'vital interests' of various third parties and the 'historical rights' of the Balkan peoples has always been a fact of life on the Balkan Peninsula.

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