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## CONFLICT OF DIFFERENT VISIONS: MACEDONIAN EMIGRATION IN BULGARIA IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

**ABSTRACT** After the World War I numerous Macedonian émigrés who found themselves in Bulgaria set up various organizations bringing them together. Although the activities of most of such organisations were controlled by the VMRO, there were some periods when it was possible for an independent pro-sovereignty movement to exist under the umbrella of Macedonian émigré associations. The forceful takeover of the Ilinden Organization – one of the most vocal champions of Macedonian interests on emigration – executed by way of the physical liquidation of its members by VMRO activists, was symptomatic of the way in which every attempt was stifled of expressing pro-independence sentiments leading to Macedonia's political independence.

**Key-words:** Macedonian emigration, Bulgaria, interwar period, Macedonian emigrant associations, anniversaries of Ilinden Uprising, newspapers of Macedonian associations.

Abundant Macedonian emigration that was in Bulgaria after the end of the First World War in the interwar period was organized in a large number of emigrant associations. Their activity was mostly controlled by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), which was why, for different occasions, they jointly appeared in public; yet there were periods when they autonomously and independently manifested their actions. The autonomy that was demonstrated in some

periods during the operation of the part of the emigrant organizations revealed a seemingly manifested unity.

Those differences related to the manner of experiencing the Macedonian revolutionary past and about the way how the Macedonian struggle would be fought further on, which at the beginning was manifested subtly, with the time got deeper and grew into open conflicts. Eventually they culminated in the physical liquidations of their opponents.

Anniversaries featuring the most important event of Macedonian revolutionary past – Ilinden Uprising, which were regularly held in the period between the two World Wars by almost all Macedonian emigrant organizations in Bulgaria, created opportunity to perceive those contradictions.

In the first year after the First War, on the anniversary of Ilinden Uprising two memorial services at two different places in Sofia were held. One of them was organized by the Brotherhood of Krusevo in the church “Sv. Spas” (“Ss. Spas”),<sup>1</sup> and the other by the Executive Committee of the Macedonian Brotherhoods in the church “Sv. Nedela” (“Ss. Nedela”).<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, although more immense and better organized, marking Ilinden memorial service were held in these two churches in the following 1920.<sup>3</sup>

Since the next 1921, the Macedonian emigrant associations in Bulgaria ceased to organize separate Ilinden celebrations in memory of those who were killed in the Uprising. This change coincided with the time when Ilinden became patronal feast of the newly established association Ilinden (which later grew into Ilinden Organization), and which took the initiative to organize these celebrations. After giving a memorial service of all those killed Macedonian revolutionaries, in Sofia in 1921 literary-musical evenings were organized.<sup>4</sup>

Programs of Ilinden celebrations organized the following few years in Sofia and other cities in Bulgaria were similar. 1922, 1923 and 1924 celebrations were visited by majority of emigration. Manifestation organized on that occasion in Sofia in 1922 was considered as the most immense Macedonian manifestation<sup>5</sup> organized so far, while the anniversary of the Ilinden in 1924 was attended by over 30.000 people.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Илинден’, *Народност* (*Narodnost*), Vol. 91, 31 July 1919, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Илинденската годишнина’, *Народност*, Vol. 92, 3 August 1919, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Покана’, *Македонија* (*Makedonija*), I, Vol. 66, 31 July 1920, p. 4; *Македонија*, I, Vol. 65, 28 July 1920, p. 2; ‘Годишнината на Илинденското въстание’, *Македонија*, I, Vol. 67, 4 August 1920, pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> В. Ковачев, ‘Отпразнуването на Илинден’, *Автономна Македонија* (*Avtonomna Makedonija*; hereafter AM), I, Vol. 35, 8 August 1921, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> The number of participating people involved cannot be determined precisely. According to some sources, it amounted to 10 000 people (‘Градниозната македонска манифестация на 6 Август’, AM, Vol. 79, p. 2), more than 20 000 people (‘За свободата на Македонија’, *Мир* (*Mir*), Vol. 28, 7 August 1922, 6650, p. 2), 18-20 000 demonstrators. (‘Илинденските празненства’, *Илинден* (*Ilinden*), II, Vol. 32, 16 August 1922, p. 1). The least the participants in Ilinden events in 1922 had the opinion of the Ivan Michailov – not less than 8 000 persons (Централен Државен Архив, София, ф. 1932, оп. 3, ае 176). Mass attendance on the anniversary of the Ilinden uprising was registered also by the Bulgarian Communist Party (‘Македонската манифестация’, *Работнически вестник* (*Rabotniceski vestnik*), Vol. 56, 9 August 1923, p. 2).

<sup>6</sup> ‘Илинден во София’, *Независима Македонија* (*Nezavisima Makedonija*), II, Vol. 70, 9 August 1924, p. 1. According to the notice of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats

The immensity of these celebrations indicated that the Macedonian emigration, after the tough military years regained the “ideological purity and moral glory”<sup>7</sup> of the Ilinden Uprising. That day of Macedonian revolutionary past was considered and denoted by emigrants as a day of the “Macedonian fighting spirit” and “Macedonian distressed justice”<sup>8</sup> and the “Macedonian day.”<sup>9</sup> The immense gatherings were organized to indicate the respect and memory of “the most Macedonian and distinct” holiday that as the “supreme holiday of Macedonians glitters ahead of our national procession to the ascent of our humanity.”<sup>10</sup>

The Uprising was the “creator of the souls and virtue”<sup>11</sup> without which liberation of Macedonia could have never been achieved. It added to the strengthening of the faith of the people in the National Movement, and among young generations, “to cultivate the dual independence, energy and desire for freedom” and to grow “with the memory of heroic battles.”<sup>12</sup> Indicating the benefits of Ilinden Uprising proceeded alongside with the predictions of Dимо Hadzi Dimov that after the first Ilinden, Macedonia “will experience its second *Ilinden* [italics in the original – V.G.] even in the following and steady period of a close *victory and liberation*.”<sup>13</sup>

Simultaneously with increasingly immense Ilinden celebrations carried out by the Macedonian emigrants and their transformation into mass Macedonian manifestations, the attempts to attach additional format to those gatherings were strengthened. Representatives of the Executive Committee of the Macedonian Brotherhoods in their attendance in these celebrations intended to focus solely on the behaviour of the Serbian and Greek authorities in Vardar and Aegean Part of Macedonia in that particular period of time. Thus they attempted to make use of the massive presence of the emigration to the Ilinden manifestations as a type of pressure on the neighbouring Balkan states. In an effort to interrupt the spiritual connection between the Macedonian emigration and Ilinden Uprising, the National Committee in the summer of 1925 introduced a new holiday called the Day of Macedonia. This feast was organized on the religious holiday Duhovden (Pentecost), which “does not connect, unite nor delight Macedonians anyhow” and which was a “step backward from the Macedonian liberation path.”<sup>14</sup>

Such a large downturn, i.e. introduction of a new Macedonian holiday was to be realized only with the existence of a very strong reason. Those were the murders, in

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and Slovenes, the number was around 35 000 people (Документарно одделение на ИНИ, Скопје, ф. Кралско Посланство во Лондон, к. XXXVII/17, ред. бр. 244.)

<sup>7</sup> ‘Манифест’, *Илинден*, II, Vol. 30, 31 July 1922, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Македонскиот ден’, *Илинден*, II, Vol. 32, 16 August 1922, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Б.Ж., ‘Илинден’, *Устрем (Ustrem)*, II, Vol. 49, 1 August 1925, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> А. Ѓовков, ‘Илинден 1903 г.’, *Илинден*, III, Vol. 20, 5 August 1923, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, ‘Илинденското вѣзстание вѣ истoријата’, *Илинден*, III, Vol. 3, 19 January 1923, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Д. Хаџи Димов, *Македонското прашање*, Скопје 1974, p. 203.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Денѣт на Македoнија’, *Македонски вестни (Makedonski vesti, hereafter MB)*, I, Vol. 21, 12 June 1935, p. 12.

September 1924, of a significant number of members of the Macedonian National Liberation Movement, and at the same time members of emigrant organizations. Physical liquidation of those persons was committed by the members of the VMRO, Ivan Mihailov's supporters because they supported May Manifesto and the announced creation of the Unique Macedonian Revolutionary Front which was to fight against all Balkan states, Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. Those liquidations had far-reaching consequences on the further development of the movement, and on the work of the Macedonian emigrant organizations in Bulgaria. After September 1924 there was no possibility anymore for the existence of any autonomous and independent manifestations within those associations. The liquidations indicated how any attempt opposing the official policy of IMRO in the future would be eliminated.

Under such conditions, the celebration of the Ilinden anniversary became increasingly modest. The tendency to minimize the importance of Ilinden was clearly expressed in the new way of organizing its anniversaries. In 1925 representatives of the Ilinden Organization, National Committee, Association of Macedonian Youth and the Association of Macedonian Girls celebrated that holiday. But as perceived by the members of Bulgarian Communist Party it was rather modest compared to the celebrations in the previous years. Boycott of the celebration by the Macedonian emigration stemmed from the opinion of the part of emigrants that the manifestation was "prepared by the police".<sup>15</sup> The lack of "suggestiveness and atmosphere of the previous years" was also noticed by the members of the Macedonian Youth Alliance.<sup>16</sup> Ilinden anniversary were organized in a similar way in the following years.

Dissatisfaction by that behavior was openly shown in 1935. Newspapers emphasized that "This famous Macedonian date so far has been underestimated, overshadowed".<sup>17</sup> Aiming at celebration of the day of the uprising as "Macedonian national holiday" again, in June 1935 decision was made to establish the Initiative (Ilinden) Committee.<sup>18</sup> Since the attempt of the Committee to achieve reconciliation with the Governing body of the Ilinden Organisation failed, in 1936 Ilinden was reclaimed Macedonian national holiday.<sup>19</sup>

By the beginning of the Second World War, those gatherings of the Macedonian emigration were broken due to frequent bans for their convening imposed by the state, and because of the behaviour of management bodies of the emigrant organizations.

All of that indicated that the IMRO controlled the overall activity of the associations of the Macedonian emigration. The adjustment of the actions of those organizations in Bulgaria rarely came into question. However, the existence of considerable fear of the newly independent manifestations in emigrant organizations could

<sup>15</sup> В. Поповски, Л. Жила, *Македонското прашање во документите на Коминтерната*, Vol. 1, P. 2: 1923-1925, Скопје 1999, p. 1169.

<sup>16</sup> Ковачъ, 'Опасна практика', *Устремъ*, II, Vol. 50, 8 August 1925, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> MB, I, Vol. 25, 10 July 1935, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> MB, I, Vol. 21, 12 June 1935, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> MB, II, Vol. 63, 5 August 1936, p. 1.

be perceived. Therefore, the action of the National Committee of the Macedonian Emigration, which in summer 1925 invited the members of the Ilinden Organization and Macedonian Youth Organization to “joint activity and cooperation”<sup>20</sup>, following the explanation of “the competence of each of the organizations”, can be interpreted as a need to reemphasize that only the Committee as Managing Body of the Association of Macedonian Immigration was entitled and obliged to manage their further activity. Although the adjustment among Macedonian emigration organizations in Bulgaria was satisfactory, their coordinated action was a process reinforcement and maintenance of which needed steady work. The danger of mutual disagreements was not totally eliminated, and it often appeared in times when it was least expected. The respond sent by the editorial board of the Macedonian youth newspaper *Ustrem* (Устрем) to the newspaper *Nashi dni* (Нашии дни) in relation to the murder of Nikola Milev, served for the Ilinden Organization as an excuse to publish in its newspaper the opinion of its members about the role of the deceased in the Macedonian Liberation Movement. Editors of the newspaper *Ilinden* (Илинден), expressing surprise why the pages of the newspaper *Ustrem* identified N. Milev with Dimo Hadji Dimov, Goce Delchev and Dame Gruev, explained that the deceased was a real politician who saw the Macedonian issue through the prism of the existing objective political situation. Reminding the editors of the newspaper *Ustrem* that N. Milev was Bulgarian statesman, and “now almost all Bulgarian public figures share the autonomous principle of the Macedonian matter”, the members of the editorial board of the newspaper *Ilinden* concluded that there was nothing unusual about it, and that he was acquainted with that attitude.<sup>21</sup>

The appearance of the editors of the newspaper of the Ilinden Organization in public was an unpleasant surprise for the members of the National Committee and was immediately interpreted as a threat to the established “mutual trust and respect” within the frames of the Macedonian emigration in Bulgaria. For those reasons, the reaction of the editors of the newspaper *Ustrem* was severe and included open attacks related to the former behavior of the members of the Ilinden Organization. According to them, the editors of *Ilinden* obviously had a tendency “to continue a recent tradition of their newspaper, which induced the newspaper *Nezavisima Makedonija* (Независима Македонија).<sup>22</sup>

Whatever incidental was that event, it nevertheless pointed to the necessity of taking additional measures to neutralize the Ilinden Organization. The manner of its implementation was determined by the National Committee at the end of April 1925. Recalling the obligation to the fatherland, the National Committee required that all members of Ilinden associations join the Macedonian Brotherhood.<sup>23</sup> Soon after presenting that request, the issue about the union of the organs of Ilinden Organization, Association of Macedonian Emigration and the Macedonian Youth Alliance (newspa-

<sup>20</sup> Државен Архив на Република Македонија (hereafter ДАРМ/DARM), Скопје, М-4259.

<sup>21</sup> ‘За в. Устрем’, *Илинден*, V, Vol. 9, 28 February 1925, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Ехо’, *Устрем*, II, Vol. 28, 7 March 1925, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Независима Македонија*, III, Vol. 108, 8 May 1925, p. 2.

pers *Ilinden, Nezavisima Makedonija* and *Ustrem*) was reinitiated. That issue was raised for the second time in a period of almost two years, and after the forced takeover of the Ilinden Organization all of the conditions for realization of that idea were finally fulfilled.

However, problems arose in achieving that task. Macedonian Youth Alliance declared issuance of a single newspaper through a referendum. The attempt regarding the same issue made by Ilinden Organization was unsuccessful. Therefore, its managerial body was forced to put that question to consideration of the Congress. Following the example of the National Committee, which adopted a conference solution for the issue of the new newspaper, the Third Congress of the members of Ilinden Organization (July, 1926) adopted a resolution to found a new daily newspaper. The manner how that idea was accepted was explained a few years later by a member of the editorial board of the newspaper *Ilinden*, Velko Dumev. According to him, he was so strongly committed to merge all Macedonian newspapers that the governing body of the Ilinden Organization declared in writing that he betrayed the interests of the Organization.<sup>24</sup> Dissatisfaction among the members of the Organization due to the discontinuation of its organ was enormous since they were not consulted by the management and their opinion was not heard prior to the negotiations regarding that issue. In presence of the delegates at the Congress the former president of the Organization, P. Acev accused the editor of the organ of the Organization that he was committed to the destruction of the newspaper.<sup>25</sup> The new newspaper *Macedonia* (Македонија), which covered the activities of the three organizations, and which newspapers ceased to be published, was rarely interested in the work of the Ilinden Organization. It was expressed so intensively that the IMRO (United) organ, the newspaper *Makedonsko delo* (Македонско дело) openly expressed its opinion that “either the report exactly expressed the reality, or the newspaper *Macedonia* sabotaged the statements of the life of Ilinden Associations.”<sup>26</sup>

It was obvious that the distrust towards the members of the Ilinden Organization still remained with the relevant circles in the Macedonian emigration and in the revolutionary movement. In general, interest in the work of this Organization has always been accompanied by repeated reminding of the information that its membership was affected by crises. A press release announced that there were “moments when adventurous elements attempted to involve the Ilinden Organization in a direction and tasks that were not common and were opposite to its orderly, generous goals.”<sup>27</sup>

Cause for such great intolerance towards this Organization was its activity till September 1924. In April the same year the Organization sent a Memorandum to A. Cankov, the President of the Bulgarian Government. Same as the former Prime Minister, A. Stamboliski it was requested “once for all to understand that the Bulgarian state pa-

<sup>24</sup> ДАРМ, 471, 7.9/893.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Трети редовенъ Конгресъ на Илинденци’, *Илинденъ*, VI, Vol. 27, 16 July 1926, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Конгресът на илинденци’, *Македонско дело* (*Makedonsko delo*), 2, Vol. 46-47, 10 August 1927, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Конгресът на илинденци’, *Македонија*, I, Vol. 223, 11 July 1927, p. 1.



triotism [...] and Macedonian patriotism are two issues that not only have nothing in common but are also directly opposite.” According to the address authors, Bulgarian governments “take consequently antithetical positions from the Macedonian principles: Independent Macedonia.”<sup>28</sup> With its overall activity the Ilinden Organization became a guardian of revolutionary traditions, and a fierce representative of Macedonian independent interests.

A long time after the physical liquidation of almost half of its managerial body the need for control of the work of that organization still existed. Fear that issues could go out of control influenced that, by the end of September 1924, the newly established editing committee of the newspaper *Ilinden* composed of Dimitar Ivanov, V. Dumev and Hristo Shaldev, Editor, received obligation to submit for review to the Managing Body important articles before their publishing.<sup>29</sup> The main requirement laid by the new leadership was that the Organization acted within its constitutional frames. As a result, the Ilinden Organization ceased its interest for the political life in Bulgaria, and the subject concerning the attitude of the Bulgarian governments to the Macedonian issue ceased to be requested by its leaders and membership.

Nevertheless, it may be perceived by the events that followed in September 1924 that the only reason for the forceful action related to the taking over of the Organization was to discipline and turn it into obedient Macedonian emigrant organization. Despite the harsh accusing words constantly addressed to the previous leadership, the data that the Ilinden Organization “is indisputably an organization appealing to the mass of Macedonian emigrants and to the Bulgarian society” may not be ignored.<sup>30</sup>

Interest for the members of the Ilinden Organization among Macedonian emigration only was increasing in the periods approaching the term for maintaining organizational congresses. Just before holding the Second Congress (July, 1925) soon as respect was expressed in the organ of the Macedonian emigration, the newspaper *Nezavisima Makedonija* to the great experience, skills and capacity of the members of the Ilinden Organization, it was anticipated that they “will perform their duties as the interests of our Fatherland dictate”.<sup>31</sup> The message was: “The road is the same for all. Through it, we all will go”. It certainly could be interpreted as a warning to all Macedonian emigrant organizations in the future to coordinate their relevant activities with those of the National Committee of the Macedonian Brotherhoods in Bulgaria.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Меморандум до господинот Претседател на Министерскиот Совет’, 20 Јули (20 Juli), I, Vol. 2, 20 April 1924, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Отчетъ на Ръководното Тело на Илинденската Организация прочетенъ на II редовенъ Конгресъ’, *Илинденъ*, V, Vol. 28, 17 July 1925, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Илинденската традиция’, *Илинденъ*, IV, Vol. 7, 20 September 1924, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Предъ конгреса на Илинденци’, *Независима Македония*, III, Vol. 117, 10 July 1925, p. 1. However, before the congress meeting of Sofia’s Ilinden societ, at which delegates were elected to the Congress, was supplied from the ilegal armed persons, and visitors were search. In orer to avoid each unpleasantly surprised at the Congress “for delegates were elected people listed by management.” В. Поповски, А. Жила, *Македонското прашање...*, p. 1169.

## SUMMARY

Numerous Macedonian emigrants in Bulgaria after the end of the First World War, in the interwar period, were organized in a large number of immigrant associations. Although the bulk of the activities of these organizations were controlled by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), there were periods when the existence of independent and sovereign manifestation was possible within the framework of the associations of the Macedonian immigration. The forced takeover of the organization that was one of the strongest representatives of the Macedonian interests in within the frames of the immigration – the Ilinden Organization, conducted via physical liquidation of its members by the members of the IMRO demonstrated the manner in which any attempt to free expression of ideas how to approach the liberation of Macedonia was eliminated.

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