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THE CHILDREN EVACUATED FROM GREECE IN 1948: TO THE EASTERN-EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND YUGOSLAVIA

ABSTRACT During the Greek civil war (1946-1949), on the basis of a special decision of the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece adopted in the name of “saving the children from the horrors of war”, around 28 000 Macedonian and Greek children were evacuated from the areas affected by military actions. Their originally planned short residence in the Eastern European countries lasted a whole decade as a direct consequence of the civil war, in which forces grouped around the Communist Party of Greece were defeated. Although new destinations – children’s homes and boarding schools in the involved countries – handled the necessary conditions for normal life, education and recreation, the desire of the Macedonian children and their parents was their permanent destinations to be in Yugoslavia respectively the People’s Republic of Macedonia, the largest center of Macedonian refugee population from Greece. Repatriation of children will be found in the center of the Cominform conflict and disrupted relations between the countries concerned with the issue of children. Therefore, their arrival in PRM or in the countries where were their parents, will be intensified in the middle of the fifth decade of last century, after the death of Stalin.

Key-words: Greek Civil War, evacuation, child refugees, organizations of Red Cross, Eastern-European countries, Yugoslavia, PR Macedonia, repatriation

One of the organized programs for the protection of the children from the horror of the wars and war conflicts that took place in Europe in the 20th century was the evacuation of the children from Greece during the Civil War (1946-1949). Although the humanity i.e. “the salvage of the children from the horror of the war” on the eve of the crucial battles which according to the war plans of the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) were about to happen in 1948¹, was emphasized as the main reason for the evacuation, there were more reasons for such a decision. One of the reasons mentioned in the historiography was the effort of the DAG to increase its effectiveness with the change of the tactics of war from guerrilla to frontal and to increase the number of the soldiers to more than a double.² In these plans for mobilization the accent was put on the underage man, as well as the women who were supposed to get released from the care for their children and channel their energy into the realization of the plans.³

The evacuation was also a counter to the project ran by the Greek Government and with the sponsorship of the Queen Frederica, which meant taking care of the children from the war areas by placing them in special children’s homes so called pedopolises established from 1947 to 1950 throughout Greece.⁴ Although the humanity was proclaimed as the main reason for this government project, its real background could be found in the slogan “to save the children from the northern provinces, to be taken across the border and to be brought up as enemies of the country”.⁵ When it comes to the Macedonian children, this project had an additional purpose which meant inculcation and reinforcement of the Greek national feeling through the content of life in the pedopolises, mainly through the educational process.⁶

The decision for the evacuation was issued on February 21, 1948,⁷ after an intense diplomatic correspondence between the Provisional Democratic Government of Greece and the Eastern European countries⁸, along with the numerous appeals from parents to the humanitarian, youth and other organizations from these countries to take

¹ Р. Кирјазовски, *Македонската политичка емиграција од Егејскиот дел на Македонија во источна Европа*, Скопје 1989, pp. 35-36.

² Idem, ‘Го бранеа и одбранија македонизмот’ in *Етничките промени во Егејска Македонија во XX век*, Скопје 2001, p. 207.

³ Idem, *Македонската политичка емиграција...*, p. 36.

⁴ Л. Денфорт, Р. Ван Бухотен, *Децата на Граѓанската војна во Грција. Бегалците и политиката на сеќавањето*, trans. by В. Чаповска, Скопје 2012, p. 115.

⁵ L. Baerentzen, ‘The “Paidomozoma” and the Queen’s Camps’ in L. Baerentzen, J.O. Iatrides, O.L. Smith (eds.), *Studies in the Greek Civil War 1945-1949*, Copenhagen 1987, p. 127 (*Modern Greek & Balkan Studies. Supplementary Volume*, 2).

⁶ В. Јотевски, *Образованието и воспитувањето на децата во грчките домови и интернати од 1948 до 1956 година* in *Етничките промени...*, p. 233.

⁷ Р. Кирјазовски, ‘Педесет години од евакуацијата на децата од Егејска Македонија’, *Гласник*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1998), p. 185.

⁸ П. Наковски, *Македонски деца во Полска (1948-1968)*, Скопје 1987, p. 18.

care of the children for a certain time.⁹ This was officially announced at the Congress of Balkan Youth on March 3, 1948 in Belgrade, when the representatives of the countries of the Eastern Bloc accepted the suggestion of the Greek delegate to help 12 000 children from Greece aged 3 to 15.¹⁰

The preparations in Greece were made through a well organized agitation by the members of the Macedonian organizations People's Liberation Front (NOF) and the Antifascist Front of the Women, whose goal was to convince the parents to let their children being taken care of in the "brotherly" countries where they would have peaceful life, care, food and education, until the situation in Greece was settled. The preparations included making lists of names of the children aged 3 to 14 in each village separately, and choosing girls and young women aged 18 to 36 who would accompany the children on the trip and during their stay abroad.¹¹ Soldiers of the DAG took care of the safety of the columns of children and mediated between the competent services of the neighboring states in the acceptance of the children on the border points Markova Noga, Crveni Steni and Nidze with Yugoslavia, in the vicinity of the village Pilkati on Gramos and the road Labanica – Bilishta on the border with Albania¹² and on the border points with Bulgaria.

The preparations were made quickly in a very short period, yet the evacuation was put through very successfully. Although the evacuation lasted from the spring until the end of the year and took in 28 000 children¹³, it was most intense in the first few months when 14 827 children – Greek and Macedonian – were evacuated from the territory of Greece.¹⁴

Albania as a temporary destination, accepted 3 376 children on its territory until the end of May 1948. After their stay in the reception point in Korce, the children were placed in children's homes and private houses in Durres, Valona, Fieri, Elbasan and Shkoder. The children were taken care of within the competence of the Directorate for social protection and the Albanian Red Cross.¹⁵ Given the fact that the country did not have enough material resources and educated personnel to provide good care for such a big number of children, all the children were transported to Yugoslavia in November that same year, and some were then transported from Yugoslavia to Romania and Eastern Germany.¹⁶

⁹ Државен Архив на Република Македонија (ДАРМ), ф. 996, к. 35.

¹⁰ *Егејска Македонија во НОБ 1948. Документи*, Vol. 5, Скопје 1981, док. бр. 73, р. 130.

¹¹ П. Наковски, *Македонски деца во Полска...*, р. 19, 21.

¹² *Ibid.*, р. 27.

¹³ About the number of evacuated children more extensively in: К.С. Мирчевска, *Нова дестинација, нова татковина. Децата-бегалци од Егејскиот дел на Македонија во Југославија и Македонија (1948-1960)*, Скопје 2012, р. 23.

¹⁴ Р. Кирјазовски, *Македонската политичка емиграција...*, р. 37.

¹⁵ *Idem*, 'Документи за егзодусот на децата од Егејскиот дел на Македонија', *Историја*, Vol. 23, No. 1-2 (1987), pp. 175-198.

¹⁶ Ф.М. Буцкова, *И ние сме деца на мајката земја...*, Скопје 1998, р. 41.

In the spring of 1948, Bulgaria accepted 2500-3000 Greek and Macedonian children from the eastern areas of the Aegean part of Macedonia and Thrace.¹⁷ The parents of about 1700 children fought in the VI and VII division of DAG and after the defeat in August, they crossed over to the territory of Bulgaria.¹⁸ Most of these children remained in the country for a short period of time, then they were transferred to Hungary, and in October 1950, the number of children who were still in Bulgaria was 672. In the period of their stay in this country, the Bulgarian Government in cooperation with the Bulgarian Red Cross housed these children in special children's homes in Burgas, Gavrovo, Karlovo, Stara Zagora etc.¹⁹ The children who stayed in this country and wanted to continue their education, were able to enroll in the secondary schools and faculties in Bulgaria.²⁰

In accordance with the agreement between the Provisional Democratic Government and the Yugoslav leadership, Yugoslavia took over the main task in the acceptance and transportation of the children in the other involved countries, as well as in the acceptance of a big number of children on its own territory.²¹ 14 028²² physically and emotionally exhausted and scared children passed through or stayed on the Yugoslav territory, and the Yugoslav Government spent enormous amount of material resources and engaged a number of organizations and institutions. After they crossed the Yugoslav-Greek border and stayed for several days in the villages of the Prespa region, the groups of children were transferred to the reception points in Bitola and Resen²³, in Brailovo, Negotino, Matka, Kozle²⁴, and from there they were transferred through Skopje and Belgrade to the children's homes in Yugoslavia and the Eastern European countries. Given the planned extension of the evacuation to the Eastern European countries, on March 16, 1948, the Yugoslav Red Cross (YRC) as the main conductor of the evacuation, sent an appeal to the organizations of the Red Cross to help with the housing of about 15 000 Macedonian and Greek children forced to look for salvation from the war out of their fatherland.²⁵ At the same time there was an intense correspondence between the leadership of the Provisional Government and its representatives in the Eastern European countries about the plans for the transport of the children, their number and the countries which would accept them.²⁶

¹⁷ Δ. Σεργος, *Το παιδομαζωμα και ποιοι φοβουνται την αληθεια*, Αθηνα 2004, pp. 281-282.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 281-282.

¹⁹ Ф.М. Буцкова, *И ние сме деца...*, pp. 41-42.

²⁰ Δ. Σεργος, *Το παιδομαζωμα...*, p. 282.

²¹ Р. Кирјазовски, 'Педесет години од евакуацијата...', p. 187.

²² Архив Југославије (АЈ), ф.507, ЦК СКЈ, Комисија за меѓународне односе (КМОБ) – Грчка, IX.33/V-253.

²³ ДАРМ, ф. 1.171, к. 11, а.е. 41.

²⁴ Ibid., к. 12, а.е. 32.

²⁵ *Борба*, 10 February 1949, p. 2.

²⁶ М. Ristović, *Dug povratak kući. Deca izbeglice iz Grčke u Jugoslaviji 1948-1960*, Beograd 1998, pp. 25-29 (*Biblioteka Društvo / Udruženje za Društvenu Istoriju*, 1).

Thus, according to the information of the YRC, in the period March-April 1948, 2490 children passed through Yugoslavia to go to Czechoslovakia, 3300 to Romania, 2254 went to Hungary²⁷, and in the first half of December 5105 children in five transports went to Romania and 735 to Hungary in two transports. On January 3, 1949, 561 children from Bulkes in Vojvodina (a place where refugees from Greece in Yugoslavia were situated) left for Czechoslovakia, and on March 4, they were followed by 501 children. On April 8, 500 children left Bulkes to go to Poland and on September 30, 1949, 532 children were sent from Bulkes to Czechoslovakia.²⁸

The first groups of children – 2850 in total – arrived in Romania in the period March-April 1948.²⁹ A number of groups of children continued to arrive until the end of the year. The last group of 1700 children arrived in this country from Albania through Yugoslavia. The same group of children was later transferred to Poland.³⁰ The Romanian Government opened several children's homes for this purpose. In the middle of 1949, 4727 children – 2177 Macedonian and 2079 Greek, 65 teachers and 132 so-called "mothers" – girls and young women who accompanied the children from their villages, were taken care of in the homes in Tulghes, Sinaia, Cluj, Arad, Oradea etc.³¹ According to the information from the Conference of the Communist Party of Greece held in October 1950, a total of 5132 children from Greece were taken care of in Romania.³²

3500–3600 children from Greece who arrived in Poland³³ in the period from the autumn 1948 to August 1950 were taken care of in this country. Their first stop was the recreational centre in Łądek Zdrój, and then the children were transferred to Solice Zdrój, in the children's state centre in Zgorzelec which operated from January 1950 to July 1951³⁴, in the children's homes in Oborniki Śląskie, Plakowice, Police, Duszniki, Grotniki and Rabka. The children who continued their education after they finished primary school were housed in the sleeping quarters of the secondary schools and vocational schools in Wrocław, Warsaw, Gdańsk, Poznań and other Polish cities.³⁵

The first train with 680 children aged 3–14, arrived in Hungary on April 3, 1948.³⁶ More children came to this country during that year, thus, including the last group of children who arrived from Albania through Yugoslavia in December, the number of children reached 3000 – 1750 Macedonian and 1250 Greek.³⁷ According to the in-

²⁷ Политика, 13 December 1948, p. 5.

²⁸ AJ, ф. 507, ЦК СКЈ, КМОВ – Грчка, IX.33/V-253.

²⁹ M. Ristović, *Dug povratak kući...*, p. 37.

³⁰ Ф.М. Буцкова, *И ние сме деца...*, p. 42.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 42-45.

³² Р. Кирјазовски, *Македонската политичка емиграција...*, p. 37.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ П. Наковски, *Македонски деца во Полска...*, p. 39, 62, 107, 159.

³⁵ Ф. М. Буцкова, *И ние сме деца...*, pp. 45-47.

³⁶ Л. Минков, *Македонската емиграција од Егејскиот дел на Македонија во Унгарија*, Скопје 2000, p. 57.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

formation of the Communist Party of Greece, there were 2859 children in October 1950 in Hungary.³⁸ After spending a few months in the reception points in Budapest, the children were transferred to 20 children's homes in Visegrad, in the children's town of Debrecen, Tiszadob, Deg, Tatabanya, Miskolc, in the vicinity of the Balaton lake etc.³⁹ The older children, who continued their education in the vocational and technical schools, were housed in boarding schools, the so-called collegiums and in special homes opened for this purpose mainly in Budapest.⁴⁰

749 children arrived in Czechoslovakia with the first train in April 1948 and until February the next year their number increased to around 3500, 1800 of whom were Macedonian.⁴¹ According to the information of the Communist Party of Greece, 4148 children were evacuated in this country.⁴² After they were temporarily housed in the refugee camps Mikulov, Vseborice and Brno-Maloměřice, the children were transferred to 21 children's homes in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. The homes were converted castles, health-resorts and recreational centers in Bestvina, Chrastava, Klokocov, Veselicko, Nove Hradky, Sobotin etc.⁴³

The reception of the children in the Eastern Germany evolved with the help of the German Committee for the support of Democratic Greece which was established by the German Socialist United Party.⁴⁴ The German Government converted 17 villas into homes for these children in several places as Radebeul, Birken etc. as well as one bigger center in Leipzig.⁴⁵ The first group of 342 children arrived in the country in August 1949, and in July 1950 720 more children aged 7 to 17, arrived from Bulgaria by train.⁴⁶ Until the end of the year the number of refugee children increased to 1128.⁴⁷ Although the German and Greek communist sources said that all the refugee children in this country were Greek, the statements of some Macedonians who still live in Leipzig and were among those children, show that there were Macedonian children in Eastern Germany.⁴⁸ Their number compared to the number of Greek children was very small – probably only 14 Macedonian children.⁴⁹

Most of the evacuated children from Greece were taken care of in Yugoslavia where many children's homes of the YRC were opened. Except for the children housed in

³⁸ P. Кирјазовски, *Македонската политичка емиграција...*, p. 37.

³⁹ Л. Минков, *Македонската емиграција...*, pp. 58-60, 64.

⁴⁰ Ф.М. Буцкова, *И ние сме деца...*, pp. 47-48.

⁴¹ Н. Робовски, *Македонците од егејскиот дел на Македонија во Чехословачка*, Скопје 1988, p. 12.

⁴² P. Кирјазовски, *Македонската политичка емиграција...*, p. 37.

⁴³ Н. Робовски, *Македонците од егејскиот дел...*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ S. Troebst, 'Evacuation to a Cold Country: Child Refugees from the Greek Civil War in the German Democratic Republic 1949-1989', *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2004), p. 676, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0090599042000246442>>.

⁴⁵ Δ. Σερβος, *Το παιδομαζωμα...*, p. 300.

⁴⁶ S. Troebst, 'Evacuation to a Cold Country...', pp. 677-678.

⁴⁷ Л. Минков, *Македонската емиграција...*, p. 173.

⁴⁸ S. Troebst, 'Evacuation to a Cold Country...', p. 677.

⁴⁹ Ф.М. Буцкова, *И ние сме деца...*, p. 50.

these institutions, the country also took care of the much greater number of children and their parents or relatives who were housed mostly in the People's Republic of Macedonia. According to the information of YRC, there were 11 600 children refugees from Greece in Yugoslavia in 1948.⁵⁰ In January 1949, there were about 2000 children in 12 children's homes in Serbia, Vojvodina, Croatia and Slovenia and more than 9000 were with their parents.⁵¹ At the beginning of 1949, 1594 children were sent to Czechoslovakia and 500 to Poland, so their number decreased to 9506 children – 7661 with their parents and 1845 housed in the children's homes of YRC.⁵²

The first improvised children's homes of YRC, which existed from April to September 1948, were in Bela Crkva, Vršac, Plandište, Jasenovо and Straža in Vojvodina.⁵³ The number of children in these homes changed constantly as a result of their frequent transit and transfer according to their age. In fact, because of these transfers and the latter repatriation of the children with their parents or relatives this was the case during the whole time of the existence of these institutions.

In the autumn of 1948, these temporary homes were closed and all school-aged children were transferred to Bela Crkva.⁵⁴ Children who were 14 and older were housed in Bulkes and the toddlers were sent to children's homes in Slovenia.⁵⁵ On the territory of Serbia and Vojvodina children's homes and refuges were also opened in the places Šid, Bogovodja, Kovilj, Čurug, Sajlovo, and in Novi Sad and Pančevo older children were sent to school and housed in the so-called homes for the students of economy and the boarding schools in these towns.⁵⁶

After the facilities in Serbia and Vojvodina were filled, the children were sent to Croatia where the existing resorts in Rovinj, Crikvenica, Malinska on the island Krk and Gerovo were used for this purpose.⁵⁷ The children came to Croatia by five transports in the period from November 12, 1948 – April 24, 1949 when 901 children were registered. This number decreased in the middle of the year as a result of the transfer of the preschool children to Slovenia and the older children to schools in Zagreb, Osijek and Samobor in Croatia, Novi Sad in Vojvodina and Kranj in Slovenia.⁵⁸

Four groups of about 400 children came to Slovenia in the period from July to September 1948⁵⁹, for whom the Slovenian Red Cross opened three children's homes, three temporary refuges and one health-resort. The children were housed in Siska,

⁵⁰ AJ, ф. 507, КМОВ – Грчка, IX.33/V-253.

⁵¹ *Борба*, 30 January 1949, 5.

⁵² AJ, ф. 507, КМОВ – Грчка, IX.33/V-253.

⁵³ M. Ristović, *Dug povratak kući...*, p. 57.

⁵⁴ ИНИ, Документационо одделение, S. Obrenov, Izbeglice, p. 461.

⁵⁵ AJ, ф. 507, КМОВ – Грчка, IX.33/V-253.

⁵⁶ M. Китаноски, Ѓ. Донеvски, *Деца бегалци од Егејска Македонија во Југославија*, Скопје 2003, pp. 59-73.

⁵⁷ AJ, ф. 507, КМОВ – Грчка, IX.33/V-253.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Политика*, 8 April 1949, p. 5.

Borlo, Mekinje, Stara Gora, Dautovlje, Sent Vid and Okroglo near Ljubljana, where ill children from all republics were taken care of.⁶⁰ In this Yugoslav republic the older children had the possibility to study in Kranj.

Most of the refugee children in Yugoslavia lived with their parents or relatives in the People's Republic (PR) of Macedonia, in Bulkes, as well as in the refugee camps in Gakovo and Krusevlje in Vojvodina where in 1948 Macedonian refugees were sent because the facilities in PR of Macedonia were full. At the end of 1949 there were 3774 children under 18 in this two refugee camps, and at the same time in PR of Macedonia, according to the official statistics, there were 6262 children.⁶¹ Children's homes for the evacuated children in the PR of Macedonia were opened in Matka, Petrovec,⁶² Prilep, Struga, Bitola, Strumica, Valandovo, as well as reception points in Kumanovo⁶³ and Rabrovo near Valandovo.⁶⁴

As a result of the process of repatriation performed with the help of the United Nations and the organizations of the Red Cross, in the period from 1951 to 1958, most of the children were taken back to their parents in the countries where they lived. This process continued further and included adult Macedonian refugees as well. The People's Republic of Macedonia was the most desired country for them. Thus, there were 25 000 refugees from the Aegean part of Macedonia in the People's Republic of Macedonia until 1957.⁶⁵ According to incomplete statistics their number increased to 31 000 in 1965 and continued to increase in the next years.⁶⁶

Nowadays the members of the generation of the former evacuated children and the members of the political emigration from the Aegean part of Macedonia, participate in the social life in the Republic of Macedonia and in the other countries where they live with their organizations and associations with the intention to cherish their memories and history. They have organized meetings and have taken concrete actions in order to fulfill their goals in the struggle for human rights of Macedonians all over the world.

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Државен Архив на Република Македонија, ф. 1.171, к. 11, а.е. 41.

Државен Архив на Република Македонија, ф. 1.171, к. 13, а.е. 4; к. 3, а.е. 27.

⁶⁰ АЈ, ф. 19, к. 213/1795.

⁶¹ ДАРМ, ф. 1.171, к. 13, а.е. 4; к. 3, а.е. 27.

⁶² ИНИ..., р. 289, 380.

⁶³ М. Китаноски, Ѓ. Донеvски, *Деца бегалци...*, pp. 201-216.

⁶⁴ Interview with Naso Bekjarovski, owned by the author.

⁶⁵ ДАРМ, ф. 1.427, к. 65, а.е. 13.

⁶⁶ К.С. Мирчевска, *Нова дестинација, нова татковина...*, р. 117.

- Државен Архив на Република Македонија, ф. 1.427, к. 65, а.е. 13.
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