

THE REVOLUTIONARY MACEDONIAN-ODRIN ORGANIZATION (1903-1905)

Zejni S. MAZLLAMI

*Faculty of Philosophy, University of Tetova
Corresponding author e-mail: zejni.mazllami@unite.edu.mk*

Abstract

Regarding the establishment of TMORO (since 1905 IMORO) and its founders, various opinions are provided by different authors. Moreover, there are numerous uncertainties concerning the place of the Founding Congress of IMORO. After 1902, the Bulgarian agents dominated the Central Committee of IMORO.

After the Ilinden uprising, IMORO was disbanded and its particular members got involved in the propaganda of Balkan countries. In the Prilep Congress, an open confrontation between the three ideologues of IMORO, Gjorche Petrov, Dame Gruev and Pere Toshev, occurred. At the Rila Congress held in October 1905, the issue of reorganizing IMORO was raised, in line with the experience gained after Ilinden.

Keywords: IMORO, ideology, revolutionary war, autonomy.

Introduction

From the ideas on which were laid the IMORO foundation and the program, over several decades, were developed two opposing doctrines. The first wanted to remain loyal and proponent of the IMORO's established core principles and therefore it was very committed to a great extent regarding the independence of the Organization (IMORO) vis-a-vis Bulgaria and other Balkan countries. The second was pro-Bulgarian, acknowledging that IMORO should rely on official Bulgaria and accept assistance from it; it considered the Macedonian issue as a Bulgarian-only issue and agreed to receive orders and other assistance for the future work of the Organization (IMORO) as well as finance from Sofia.

Description of research methods

Relevant literature in Albanian, Macedonian, Serbian, and Bulgarian was selected for the drafting of the paper. Due to the nature of the paper, three main research methods were used: analysis, descriptive and comparative methods. Being aware that historiography is a discourse profoundly related to politics, particular attention was paid to the materials used as well as to their source.

A short overview of the establishment and character of IMORO

In general, October 23, 1893, in Salonica is known as the date of the founding of the Secret Macedonian-Odrin Revolutionary Organization. Dame Gruev, Petar Pop Arsov, Hristo Batandzhiev, Andon Dimitrov, Hristo Tatarchev, and Ivan Hadzi Nikolov are mentioned as its founders, of whom, at the first meeting (January 1904) Hristo Tatarchev was elected the chairman and Dame Gruev as the secretary [Душан Х. Константинов (1984): 33-47].

According to Castelan, in the beginning, IMORO was joined by many intellectuals in its ranks [G. Castelan (1997): 375-376], an opinion also shared by the scholar L. Stavrianos [L. Stavrianos (2005): 495]. Regarding the establishment of IMORO (since 1905 IMORO) and its founders, various opinions are provided by different authors [Историски Институт ЈНА (1959): 16-18; G. Castelan (1997): 376].

Some authors see Goce Delcev as the founder of IMORO, but it is known that he was not one of the founders and that he joined IMORO in the autumn of 1894 (К. Тодоровска (2002): 43), while until December 1896, he was not part of the governing structures, although “he wished to reach the highest positions, from where he would have more opportunities to understand the truth” [ДАРМ: 773.1.7/7-8].

The Macedonian historiography sees the Congress held in Salonica in 1896 as the Founding Congress of IMORO, where the principle for the fight for autonomy was adopted. Goce Delcev and Gjorche Petrov drafted the Internal Rules of procedure, consisting of ten chapters with ten articles [Христо А. Полјански (1985): 61-62], this was the only Congress where Goce Delcev, Dame Gruev, Gjorche Petrov, and Pere Toshev participated together [Душан Х. Константинов (1984): 70-71].

On June 1894, the first local IMORO committee was founded in Kavadarci, then in Prilep at the end of June, in Bitola at the beginning of August, and several weeks later in Stip [Душан Х. Константинов (1984): 49-56].

On August 1894, a meeting was organized in Resen, and it was decided that the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization should manage all the municipal and exarchate schools, and appoint teachers from the ranks of the Organization [К. Тодоровска (2002): 43].

Initially, the territory of “Macedonia” was divided into six circles, which later became five, namely: Salonica, Monastir, Skopje, Serres, and Odrin (Edirne). The region’s territory was divided into revolutionary districts, and these were then into provinces and sub-provinces.

There were governing bodies – committees at the head of each organizational-territorial unit [К. Тодоровска (2002): 31].

When the population was included in the Organization (IMORO), no distinction was made between exorcists and patriarchists [М. Пандевски (1968): 65].

The organization, undoubtedly, possessed a great deal of secrecy. Those who knew the movement leaders’ names were very few and all were subjected to them blindly. Cases of betrayal were very rare and were always punished mercilessly and quickly by death [К. Сидовски (1991): 102].

On the initiative of Dame Gruev, Hristo Matov became a member of IMORO. In August 1895, in the capacity of the negotiator of IMORO, Dame Gruev discussed with the Vrhovist delegate, Colonel Jankov, but the talks ended unsuccessfully [Душан Х. Константинов (1984): 65-69]. The first beyond-the-border representative of the IMORO Central Committee in Sofia was appointed by Goce Delchev and Gjorche Petrov as his assistant [Душан Х. Константинов (1984): 78].

Among the first major successes of IMORO was its rapid expansion in Pirin Macedonia [Д. Митрев (1970): 32]. Ivan Garvanov's acceptance into the IMORO's ranks was a fatal mistake (Душан Х. Константинов (1984): 85-86) since, with his assistance, Bulgarian agents dominated the IMORO Central Committee after 1902 [Историски Институт ЈНА (1959): 21].

According to Pavel Deliradev, the ideas on which the IMORO foundation and program were based were: a) autonomy as a phase leading to reunification with Bulgaria, and b) autonomy as a phase toward the Balkan Federation; these ideas developed into two opposing doctrines, which were distinguished as reactionary-annexationist and revolutionary-federalist [М. Пандевски (1985): 103].

A full reconciliation was never reached between the Exarchate and IMORO. The idea of evolution, reflected in the educational-religious activity of the Bulgarian Exarchate, was undoubtedly in opposition to the revolutionary ideas promoted by IMORO [М. Миноски (2008): 87].

IMORO after Ilinden

Related to the Mürzsteg reforms, IMORO addressed them for the first time with an appeal on December 23, 1903. This appeal of the central insurgent headquarters assessed the uprising, described Mürzsteg's reforms as tremendously unsatisfactory, and therefore dismissed them and guided the future activity of IMORO.

After the Ilinden uprising, IMORO was disbanded and its particular members got involved in the propaganda of Balkan countries [*Извештаи од 1903-1904 година на австриските претставници во Македонија* (1955): 169-173].

The long discussions in narrow and broader circles, in congresses in Macedonia and abroad, sensitive issues, and protected attitudes regarding ideological and tactical principles of the Organization (IMORO), led to the inevitable need for certain mechanical changes of the same [Ј. Љапс (1961): 245].

One of the most discussed issues was the decentralization of IMORO, to prevent the rise of extremist and dictatorial elements at its governing positions, but the fundamental issue that led to the fragmentation of the Organization (IMORO) was also IMORO's relations vis-a-vis Bulgaria and other Balkan countries. Both groups in the ranks of IMORO maintained their positions to gain supporters.

Thus, one group which was represented by Jane Sandanski in Macedonia, and by Petar Pop Arsov and others in Sofia, wanted to remain loyal and proponent of the IMORO's established core principles and therefore it was very committed to a great extent regarding the independence of the Organization (IMORO) vis-a-vis Bulgaria and other Balkan countries.

The second was pro-Bulgarian, but did not have any distinguished activists in Macedonia, and was led by Boris Sarafov, Hristo Matov; Ivan Garvanov, Hristo Tatarchev, and others who claimed that IMORO should rely on official Bulgaria and accept assistance from it; it considered the Macedonian issue as Bulgarian-only issue and agreed to receive orders and other assistance for the future work of the Organization (IMORO) as well as finance from Sofia, not seeking cooperation with other national elements in Macedonia [Г. Тодоровски (1987): 38-39].

At the beginning of 1904, while Petrov, Toshev, and Gruev were staying in Macedonia, some IMORO activists in Sofia thought that these three patriots were members of a temporary Governing council, thinking that a Central Bureau with headquarters in Sofia should be founded instead of a CC, but none of them accepted this. At the same time, they presented Sarafov's proposal to establish a new IMORO CC beyond Macedonia's ethnic borders. However, at the Prilep Congress, an open confrontation between the three surviving ideologues of IMORO occurred: Gjorche Petrov demanded decentralization, Dame Gruev demanded the return of centralization, and Pere Toshev demanded the national coloration of IMORO. The Prilep Congress adopted "*The Draft Program of IMORO*" and it also condemned the chauvinist propaganda of the Balkan states [Душан Х. Константинов (1984): 133-138].

On the verge of the General Congress, regional congresses took place, but all these congresses were organized without any coordination or agreement between them. This was reflected both in the decisions made and in the initiative to organize the General Congress [И. Катарџиев (1965): 234].

In mid-April 1904, the Congress of the revolutionary region of Strumica was convened. Hristo Matov and Hristo Tatarchev were accused of violating IMRO's independence by joining the Vrhovist Committee. In the autumn of 1904, the Congress of the revolutionary region of Monastir was convened. The Congress was attended by: Dame Gruev, Pere Toshev, and Gjorche Petrov.

On January 2, 1905, the Congress of the revolutionary region of Skopje took place, attended by a total of 20 delegates, among whom was Todor Alexandrov as well. On June 1905, the works of the IMRO's revolutionary region of Salonica took place, and special attention was paid to the relations between IMRO and the Exarchate. On July 29, 1905, the Congress of the revolutionary region of Serres was held, where special attention was paid to economic and cultural-educational issues [*Национално освободително движење на македонските и тракииските бугари 1878-1944*, III (1997): 39-43].

The Rila Congress took place beginning of November 1905, where 22 delegates from six revolutionary regions participated, namely: P. Toshev, Gj. Petrov, G. Pop Hristov, P. Hristov, D. Daskalov, B. Sarafov, D. Gruev, M. Razvigorov, Petar Kushev, Boris Monçev, Argir Manasiev, H. Çernopeev, Ivan Iliev, Manush Georgiev, Stojko Haxhiev, L. Maxharov, S. Ikonomov, Kliment Shapkarev, J. Sandanski, I. Baltov, I. Tomov and T. Popantov. Dame Gruev was elected the head, while I. Baltov the secretary of the Organization [*Национално освободително движење на македонските и тракииските бугари 1878-1944*, III (1997): 45].

Reorganization of IMORO was one of the issues raised in Congress, in line with the experience gained after Plinden. This issue sparked heated discussions in Congress. Jane Sandanski and his followers were determined about the decentralization system. They were against the draft constitution of Pere Toshev, who in this case was supported by Boris Sarafov and his followers. Dame Gruev was indecisive on this issue also (Г. Тодоровски (1987): 99).

After extensive and rowdy discussions, the Rila Congress adopted the IMORO Constitution and Rules of Procedure. The Constitution encompasses the essential goals of IMORO, the means for their realization, the structure, the orientation of the organization, and the material means.

According to the new Constitution, IMORO aimed to bring together all the dissatisfied elements in Macedonia and the Province of Edirne towards one goal, regardless of nationality, to gain full political autonomy in these two regions. The Rila Congress also adopted a Regulation, consisting of 15 chapters and 216 articles [*Национално освободително движење на македонските и тракииските бугари 1878-1944*, III (1997): 50-51].

Apart from the Constitution, the following decisions were approved in the Congress of Rila: 1) The re-establishment of the secret magazine "*Revolucionen list*"; 2) Considering accepting money and any other assistance from other governments, as well as the Bulgarian government, as an unacceptable activity; 3) Informing General Tsonchev regarding the Congress decisions and that he and his supporters must obey IMORO [Г. Тодоровски (1987): 104].

Following the IMORO regulations of 1902 and 1905, its structure consisted of the Central Committee, committees of regions, districts, counties, and cities. The Central Committee was the highest body, consisting of six members: three were legal and three were illegal. At the Rila Congress, members of the IMORO Central Committee were elected: Dame Gruev, Pere Toshev, and Eftim Spostranov. Each revolutionary region was governed by a 5-7-member district council, two of which were illegal [*Национално освободително движење на македонските и тракииските бугари 1878-1944*, III (1997): 52].

Beyond the border representatives of the IMORO in the Rila Congress were elected: Gjorche Petrov, Petar Pop Arsov, and Dimitar Stefanov [K. Pandev (1982): 101].

The Internal Organization (IMORO) at the Rile Congress took a strong and uncompromising stance toward all organizations operating within Macedonia. This decisiveness was both against the Vrhovists and the Serbian and Greek troops, the conclusion was clear: "*All those agitating, be that in Macedonia or abroad,*

based on the liberation from the Bulgarians and joining them, should be expected with hostility by IMORO, just as it expects the agitation and Serbian and Greek chetas” [Г. Тодоровски (1987): 106].

At the Rila Congress, Boris Sarafov was accused of receiving money from the Serbian government to allow Serbian cheats to enter Macedonia. Jane Sandanski was accused of not starting the uprising in his region, at the same time as the Ilinden uprising [*Национално освободително движење на македонските и тракииските бугари 1878-1944*, III (1997): 50].

The terror resumed with greater vigor, as IMORO also began clearing some internal misunderstandings. The pro-Bulgarian Vrhovists accused the autonomists, called “*centralists*”, of being responsible for the Ilinden defeat, and the congresses of Salonica and Rila in 1905 became the arena of violent clashes, followed by gunfire on the ground [G. Castelan (1997): 378].

Conclusion

The Skopje historiography considers the Congress held in Salonica in 1896 as the Founding Congress of IMORO, where was adopted the principle for the fight for autonomy.

After the Ilinden uprising, IMORO was disbanded and its particular members got involved in the propaganda of Balkan countries.

One of the fundamental issues that led to the fragmentation of the Organization (IMORO) was also the IMORO's relation towards Bulgaria and other Balkan countries.

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