

## THE APPEARANCE OF THE "MACEDONIAN ISSUE"

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Note

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### Abstract

When used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the name Macedonia referred to antiquity. Macedonia as a term was used for a vaguely defined region. It was not the wealth of Macedonia that attracted the cravings of the neighboring countries, but its strategic position, as Macedonia was the center of the Balkan world. The Balkan diplomacy, since 1878 was largely dependent on the regulation of the “Macedonian issue”. The consolidation of the Macedonian people as a nation, from 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century did not find complete scientific enlightenment.

*Keywords:* Macedonia, history, conflict, nation

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When used again in the 19th century, the name Macedonia referred to Philip’s kingdom, the antiquity, but it had not been more than a geographic term; the Ottomans were separated in vilayets and sanjaks with frequently changing borders (G. Castelan (1997): 370). The term Macedonia was used for a vaguely defined region (A. Матковски (2009): 89), but approximately stretched from Sharr Mountain in the north to the Aegean Sea, from Mountains Olimp and Pind in the south, from Rhodope Mountains in the east to Ohrid Lake in the west (Ch&B. Jelawich (no publication year): 192). Therefore, Macedonia can be described as a province which approximately includes the territory of three Ottoman vilayets - vilayet of Thessaloniki, Bitola and Kosovo (L. Stavrijanos (2005): 493).

Since the Russian diplomacy did not have a clear definition for Macedonia, it imposed in the diplomatic circles that a new name be used “*Three Vilayets*” instead of this one, with geographic meaning for the vilayet of Kosovo, Bitola and Thessaloniki (ДАРМ (2004): 211-212). It was not the wealth of Macedonia that attracted the cravings of the neighboring countries, but its strategic position, since it controlled the great traditional roads from Danube to Aegean Sea along the Vardar Valley (G. Castelan (1997): 371).

Because of its geographic position, Macedonia was the center of the Balkan world (F. Schevill (2002): 350). For this purpose Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, all wanted to get Macedonia or a part of it, for three main reasons. Firstly, this will enlarge the country and will include more citizens within it. Secondly, the benefit of river valleys Vardar and Struma and railways along them, would have great economic earnings. The third one and maybe the most important, whoever would control Macedonia would be the most powerful state in the Balkans (Ch&B. Jelawich (no publication year): 192), therefore the lordship over Macedonia enabled lordship over the Balkans (S. Pavlović (2001): 247).

Balkan diplomacy, since 1878 to a large extent is dependent on the regulation of this explosive matter, the separation of Macedonia between the three neighboring states: Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia (L. Stavrijanos (2005): 493). It is difficult to be found such province in the whole Peninsula, since all Balkan migrations through Vardar had left traces behind. Consequently, Macedonia became a museum of the Balkan nations (F. Schevill (2002): 350).

The result of a half-century filled with religious and educational conflicts, propaganda with motives from history, linguistics and ethnography, reflected on contradictory statistics of protagonists, as well as those of, more or less impartial experts. The distribution according to religions was difficult to indicate the ethnic groups, while the language criterion was insufficient, (G. Castelan (1997): 371-374). The population of less than two million people was divided into nine different ethnic groups: Turkish, Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian, Macedonian, Albanian, Vlach, Jewish and Gypsy (Ch&B. Jelawich (no publication year): 192). All the linguists and philologists from Balkan countries used their arguments to claim the area for their special nationality (Ch&B. Jelawich (no publication year): 192), so those citizens of Macedonia who lived near the Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian border in most cases were qualified as Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian (L. Stavrijanos (2005): 493).

The situation of national consolidation of Macedonian people as a nation, from the 19th to the 20th century, has not found full scientific light, although certain authors successfully follow the path of evolution of culture and political thought in the past (M. Пандевски (1986): 28).

In the Committee memorandum “*Union and Progress*” sent to the consuls of the Great Powers, among other things was said: “*The purpose of Europe is to create a kind of Macedonian state or an autonomous*

Macedonian province, but both of them do not distinguish between themselves and are equally dangerous. However, a known Macedonian state was destroyed 2000 years ago and from ancient Macedonians today there is no trace. From the past of Macedonia today besides the name there is nothing else. Macedonia is nothing else besides a historical memory. As Macedonians don't exist, neither does Macedonia (MAHY (2008): 66-69).

The English journalist, John Foster Fraser, who visited Macedonia in 1905, concluded that no special Macedonian nation exists, since, according to him, *nationality in Macedonia is a matter of fear, politics and religion. Race has nothing to do with it. Language does not help you much, because most Macedonians are bilingual, and they change their tongue when they change their party. Again, you meet peasants with Hellenic or Bulgarian sentiments who can speak nothing but Turkish. As it is, no country is easier to govern with than Macedonia* (A. Matkovski (2009): 103-104).

According to Castelani, the Macedonian issue was directly connected to the Albanian one (Ch. & B. Jelawich (no publication year): 202-203), since the notion "Macedonia" and the so-called "Macedonian issue" were imposed arbitrarily in diplomatic circles, without considering the historical and ethnographic realities, it violated the geographic and ethnic integrity of the Albanian territories as well. The geographic area of "Macedonia" in its broadest sense collided with Albania's wide borders (H. Purlku (2009): 201), since only the vilayet of Shkodra and Janina were determined as Albanian lands (S. Skëndi (2000): 277).

The geographical term "Macedonia" was not only unacceptable to the official Istanbul, but it was also unacceptable to the Albanian National Movement due to its expansionist motifs promoted through that name or notion towards Albanian lands, namely Albania. Therefore The Albanian National Movement, led by the Peja League during this period, considered the so-called "Macedonian issue" and the expansion of the "Macedonian movement" as harmful to the Albanian national interests, so it opposed it (H. Purlku (2009): 201-202).

Krste Misirkov, admitted that no researcher has dealt with the issue of Slavic nationality in particular. We were actually called "бугару" (Bulgarian) and "християни" (Christian) in the national sense. Our common destiny in the Ottoman Empire gave us the general name Bulgarian until the liberation of Bulgaria, but it remained as a tradition in Macedonia even after its liberation. According to this, the Bulgarians presented their pretensions in Macedonia, and the Macedonians expected liberation from Bulgaria (K. Misirkov (1980): 109-110).

The British journalist H.N. Breilsford, who stayed in Macedonia in 1903-1904, concluded that "*the ordinary Slavic peasant has no clear picture when it comes to his national identity.*" The German politician H. Vendel, who stayed in Macedonia in 1917, also wrote that "*the Slav population has no idea on this issue (national affiliation)*" (Д. Пери (2001): 24).

The change of nationality in Macedonia XX was a common issue even at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, a Serbian teacher informed the Serbian general consul in Skopje that Stevan, a Bulgarian Duke from the village of Bulacani, asked to negotiate entry on the Serb side along with all his village and four other villages, totaling 116 houses (ДАРМ: 19.1.81/149).

The national affiliation of the population was also affected by violence from rival armed propaganda, which could also affect the ethnic structure of a certain settlement. Therefore in the spring of 1908, a Serb teacher from the town of Kratovo complained to the Serbian general consul in Skopje regarding the continued decreasing number of the Serbian population in this city. He stressed that only five to eight years ago there were over 100 Serbian houses in the town, but now (in 1908) there were only 30 houses left. He demanded increased financial aid and Serbian educational activity from the Serbian consul, in order to maintain the Serbian element in Kratovo and the surroundings (ДАРМ: 19.1.31/54-55).

The reappearance of the "Macedonian issue" has occupied an important place in the Russian social, political and scientific press. The Russian press highlighted that Macedonia is a condition for further cultural and political life for Bulgaria and represents a very important issue, while for the aspirations of the neighboring countries it was emphasized that when they seek the whole Macedonia for them, they forget that that country does not actually belong to any of them (Л. Шатилова (1989): 175).

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