Vlassis Vlasidis - Veniamin Karakostanoglou

Recycling Propaganda: Remarks on Recent Reports on Greece's "Slav-Macedonian Minority"[1]

1. In less than twelve months, between November 1993 and October 1994, at the height of the controversy over the recognition of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (hereafter FYROM), at least five different NGO reports have focused on the alleged ethnic "Macedonian" minority living in Greece. They all share an extremely critical point of view of Greek policy. In November 1993, Professor Erik Siesby, on behalf of the Danish Helsinki Committee was the first to submit a fifteen-page long report on *The Slav Macedonians in Greece.* Lois Whitman, Deputy Director of Human Rights/Helsinki Watch, and her staff, followed in April 1994 with a most detailed booklet of 85 pages, under the poetic title, *Denying Ethnic Identity. The Macedonians of Greece.* These two accounts were the result of a joint visit to Greek Western Macedonia in July 1993. A similar visit by two Oxford dons followed in May 1994. The report was prepared basically by a journalist, Noel Malcolm, and was sponsored under the hitherto unknown British Helsinki Human Rights Group. It was entitled *Macedonian Minorities: The Slav Macedonians of Northern Greece and the Treatment of Minorities in the Republic of Macedonia* and drew a lot from the previous counterparts by Helsinki Watch. Siesby's and Whitman's views have been incorporated in the annual report by the International Helsinki Federation published in the fall of 1994. Whitman's account was also mentioned as a source in the U.S. Department of State annual report on Human Rights Practices in Greece for 1994, although the Department's authors were careful to keep distance form Whitman's

1. This study has been benefited immensly by comments and researches of various scholars cooperating with the Institute for Balkan Studies and the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, in Thessaloniki.

far-fetched assertions and conclusions. In the same period (fall 1994) Minority Rights Group International published its own review on the Southern Balkans. Its intention, as it is openly stated by the editor Alan Phillips (see p. 5), was to focus on the Greek case exclusively; but after second thoughts it was considered preferable to expand the scope in order to avoid a misinterpretation of their motives. In any case the chapter on "The Slavomacedonian Minority in Greece: a case study in Balkan nationalism" occupies almost one half of the report. It was prepared by Minority Rights Group Greece, that is —in name at least— by its Greek representative Mr Panagiotis Dimitras, a lawyer who had also escorted Siesby and Whitman in their Greek Macedonian expeditions in 1993 and apparently had been the main contributor to their reports. The very same year the MRG International reprinted for the third time Hugh Poulton's book, *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict*, first published in 1989, whose views and conclusions on "Macedonians" in Greece fully correspond with the above mentioned reports[2]. Indeed it appears that Poulton was the basic source of all these reports. Similar views by the same author can be traced in the 1989 report (No 82) of MRG International on *Minorities in the Balkans*, as well as in a chapter on "The Rest of the Balkans", which he prepared for a book on *Minority Rights in Europe* published in the series "Chatham House Papers" in 1994[3].

Students of Balkan affairs would be reluctant to accept the view that the publication of all these reports has been purely coincidental. Indeed these twelve months (1993-94) have coincided with a period when relations between Greece and FYROM had reached a dead end. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that the heated international discussion of the Macedonian Question and the minority issues which are part of it have attracted the interest of the relevant NGOs. After all, it is their task to monitor the living conditions of minorities, which during periods of international crisis, as a rule, deteriorate considerably. However, a thorough examination of these reports has revealed certain interesting aspects that cast a shadow on the objectivity, if not the

2. See pp.173-192.

3. Hugh Poulton, "The Rest of the Balkans", *Minority Rights in Europe*, Hugh Miall (ed.), (London: Chatham House Papers, 1994). This critique does not include Hugh Poulton's most recent study *Who are the Macedonians* ? (Hurst and Company, 1995).

motives, of their authors. The terms, the arguments and the sources employed indicate that foreign observers have become active participants in the prolonged controversy between Greece and FYROM. In other words instead of examining the minority issue *ad hoc*, i.e. outside its obscure diplomatic framework, these publications seem to have contributed significantly to the crisis by creating additional points of friction and misunderstanding.

In brief all four reports as well as Poulton's studies and some recent anthropological articles, convey the impression that:

(a) "Macedonian" is a primordial ethnic identity embraced by a considerable proportion of the Christian population of Macedonia and still corresponds with a sizeable ethnic minority in Greece.

(b) Since 1912 this alleged minority has been suppressed and assimilated by the Greek State.

(c) Persecution of the minority at various levels is still practised widely and systematically by the Greek authorities.

In support of these arguments an extensive —at least at first sight— bibliography has been employed, together with interviews, xeroxed documents, and accounts of human rights violations. The uninformed reader as well as most foreign politicians and diplomats, NGO activists and journalists are exposed to dozens of references to scholarly publications, even to unpublished articles, statistics, decrees, state gazettes, and textbooks which allegedly testify to the writers' competence and industry and guarantee the objectivity of their views.

This critique will not venture either to present historical counter arguments for each single point made in the reports or to undermine the validity of their interviews with the authors' informants. Instead it will seek to challenge the generalising character of their accounts (i.e. the idea of an on-going "ethnic cleansing") by revealing (a) the misuse of data and terms, (b) the use of deceptive data, (c) the selective use —indeed the recycling— of biased bibliographical sources.

2.1. To start with, it would be interesting to examine the views of the organisations' observers about ethnic identities, an issue which has been the subject of many anthropological studies. For Erik Siesby the existence of a Macedonian ethnic identity in Greece is self-evident since there is a distinctive and corresponding language. This is perhaps why

most of his points, actually one third of his report, deal with the language rights both in the past and nowadays. As a lawyer he even produced the testimony of a linguist who verified that the official "Macedonian" language spoken in FYROM exists! However, throughout his report Siesby used various terms, like "Slav-Macedonian", "Macedonian" and "local Slav-Macedonian" as identical to each other. Had he tried to define their content, as other observers after him did, he would have realised that they correspond to extremely ill-defined groups of people, bilingual, Greek- or Slav-speaking, of Greek ethnic identity in their overwhelming majority. Groups which in any case would all agree that linguistic criteria are not only insufficient to denote ethnic nuances in the Balkans; they can also be misleading.

2.2. Others appear to be more familiar with local problems of identification —at least at first sight. Whitman mentioned in her report (see p. 1) that during her field work in Greek Macedonia she had met "ethnic Macedonians" who identified themselves as such and they accepted their slavic origin; she also encountered "Macedonians" who claimed to be Greeks of Macedonian origin and "Greeks not of Macedonian descent" who considered themselves as "Greek". Then, on page five of her report, she regrouped the population of Greek Macedonia into two lots: the locals of Slavic origin (settled around the 6th century) and the Greeks, many of whom are inter-war Asia Minor refugees. It would be interesting to know how and to whom the questions were asked and phrased and how they were translated from English into Greek and vice versa, since in the Greek language the terms "ethnic" and "national" are used as identical, while *katagogi* —another term which must have been employed often in the discussions— means not only ethnic but geographical origin as well. In any case Whitman and her staff opted (see p. 1 note 1) to use the term "Macedonian" to refer to members of the "ethnic Macedonian minority" in Greece. The majority of the Slavophone inhabitants of the districts visited would hardly agree with this conclusion, as they identify themselves as Greeks. It is interesting to learn after all why representatives of Helsinki NGOs appear to discard the right of a person to self-determination —as sanctioned by CSCE documents on the Human Dimension— and assume for themselves the role of detectors of such identification based on linguistic or

historical data of dubious validity.

Whitman's choice can only be understood if two points are clarified: American observers although they copy a widely acceptable definition of ethnicity, appear to believe that it is a primordial and pure identity with immutable characteristics and tend to ignore that it is historically constructed. This is perhaps why they believe that people who claim to be Greek but are of "Macedonian origin" (i.e. "they descend from a Slavic group which settled in the area around the sixth century A.D."!) must be classified as "ethnic Macedonians".

The second point is the bibliography which has been used. When searching for arguments in support of a distinct Macedonian identity reference is made either to an anthropologist, Loring Danforth[4], who relies exclusively on secondary FYROM sources, or to interviews with a limited group of activists in Greece. Similar problems with bibliography can be traced in all issues dealing with the fluctuations and the actual size of the "minority": For the number of "ethnic Macedonians" in 1912 Hugh Poulton is cited as an expert[5], but the latter is using also FYROM post 1945 secondary sources only[6]. In the case of inter-war demographic changes in Macedonia Poulton (using the FYROM historian Hristo Andonofski[7] as well as Elizabeth Barker[8]) is cited again. In both

4. Loring M. Danforth, "Claims to Macedonian identity", *Anthropology Today*, 9/4 (1993), 7.

5. *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict*, p. 175 (London, 1994).

6. He is citing Todor Simofski's, "The Balkan Wars and their Repercussions on the Ethnical Situation in Aegean Macedonia", *Glasnik*, 16/3 (1972), 61. It must be pointed out here that Simofski himself is apparently using the Bulgarian professor Jordan Ivanoff's book, *La Question Macedonienne au point de vue historique, ethnographique et statistique* (Paris, 1920), pp. 186-187 which is based on an early 20th century Bulgarian statistic compiled by Vasil Kancev, an inspector of the Bulgarian schools in Macedonia who naturally counted numerous Bulgarians but no Macedonians at all; *see Makedonija. Etnografija i Statistika*, (Sofia, 1900), pp. 281-283.

7. Poulton is using a paper by Andonofski in English with no references at all. We preferred to use the original work i.e. Hristo Andonovski, "Makedonskoto Nacionalno Malcinstvo vo Grcija, Bulgarija i Albanija", *Glasnik*, 18/1 (1974), 33, in order to be able to trace down the latter's sources. Again it seems that Andonofski, in his attempt to estimate the number of inter-war refugees leaving Greek Macedonia he used (rather he misused) the classic Bulgarian article by Vl. Rumenov; see "Balgarite v Makedonija pod grucka vlact", *Makedonski Pregled*, 4 (1941), 90, issued at the time when Bulgaria occupied part of Greek Macedonia and certainly was in need of arguments to support its annexationist aims.

8. *Macedonia. Its Place in Balkan Power Politics* (London, 1950). The British writer is

cases the figures are mistaken. In another case (see p. 8) the number of the Slav-speaking men and women of the so-called Democratic Army who fled to Yugoslavia after the end of the Greek Civil War (1949) is estimated at 35,000 to 213,000! The lowest figure is drawn by Evangelos Kofos[9], but it is deceitful because Kofos clearly says that this figure includes also people who had been drafted by force. Surely the source was not checked properly. The upper limit is also a mistake. It is based on p. 82 of *Macedonia and its Relations with Greece* (Skopje, 1993) published by the "Council for Research into South-eastern Europe" of the Macedonian (i.e. FYROM) Academy of Sciences and Arts. In support of that figure in particular, in this latter publication, reference is made to the communist newspaper *Protoporos*, issue of 15 May 1946, that is even before the beginning of the Civil War. If readers are to believe that the correct figure lays in between they are wrong again.

American observers' difficulties in assessing the sources and in using valid criteria is also evident when they eventually deal with the present size of the minority. Four different sources are cited, but the figures given are not compatible at all. Activists think that all non refugee Greeks in Greek Macedonia are "ethnic Macedonians", whom they estimate to be one million. FYROM officials claim some 230-270,000 co-nationals in Greek Macedonia. The 1951 Greek census gives 41,000 Slav-speakers. The 1992 State Department report mentioned 10-50,000 people descendants of Slav-speakers but refrained from characterising them as "ethnic Macedonians". Again the confusion between language and ethnicity is obvious.

2.3. The theory of Noel Malcolm, the observer who prepared the chapter on Greece for the British Helsinki Human Rights Group, is in no less problematic than that of Siesby and Whitman. He seems to accept that race and language determine ethnicity (see pp. 1-2). On these grounds Slavophones in northern Greece (whose "ancestors came to this

drawing her figures from C. A. Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (London, 1934), p. 439 and Stephen Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey* (New York, 1932); but both lacked the final report on the exchange of populations between Greece and Bulgaria which came out in 1932.

9. *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia* (Thessaloniki, 1964; New York, 1993), p. 186 (page ref. to N.Y. edition).

part of the Balkans in the Slav migrations of the sixth and seventh centuries") are classified willy-nilly as "Macedonians" (potentially a FYROM national minority in Greece)[10].

Malcolm's obvious partiality to FYROM on the question of identities is not an exceptional phenomenon in his report. Unlike Siesby and Whitman, he has made clear that he relies more comfortably on FYROM sources regarding figures as well. Thus he considers as the "most careful estimate" of the population in 1912, that furnished by historian Stoyan Kiselinofski[11]. Malcolm also draws figures from the same author for the inter-war period and the departure of Slav-speakers to the north after the Greek Civil War[12]. Additional examples also reveal his uncritical handling of data. Dimitris Lithoxoou[13], a leading member of the "Rainbow" (claiming to be an "ethnic Macedonian" party in Greece) has calculated that the number of Slav-speakers in a certain region of Greek Macedonia in 1951 was 3.5 times higher than that given by the official census[14]. Based on that calculation Malcolm went as far as to claim (p. 6) that the total number of Slav-speakers in the whole of

10. It is bizarre that for the same author linguistic affinity between east- and west- (i.e. Macedonian) Bulgarian dialects does not imply common ethnic identity (see p. 2). The rhetorical question which must be posed here is: does Malcolm believe that the difference between ethnic identities depends on the degree of linguistic affinity? An affirmative reply would necessarily put in doubt ethnic difference between French-speaking Belgians and French, Austrians and Germans etc.

11. *Grckata Kolonizacija vo Egejska Makedonija, 1913-1940* (Skopje, 1981), pp. 36-37. A careful reading of Kiselinofski's writings reveals that he had copied the Carnegie Committee 1914 report on the Balkan Wars which also counted Bulgarians and not Macedonians. A further investigation makes clear that the Carnegie Report had presented but not endorsed the above mentioned Bulgarian statistic by Professor Ivanoff. The Greek version of the population break-down had also been given by the same Committee in the same report, which expectedly has been ignored by Kiselinofski, and subsequently by Malcolm.

12. It is mistaken to claim that Kofos referred to the emigration and deaths of Slav-speakers as a "beneficial side-effect". The term "beneficial" in his book refers only to those Slav-Macedonians who had collaborated with the Axis forces and Communist Yugoslavia in order to dismember the Greek state.

13. An ethnic Greek, resident of Athens, with no links to Macedonia (or to FYROM) and a "Rainbow" candidate for the 1994 European elections.

14. Dimitris Lithoxoou, "I mitriki glossa ton katoikon tou ellinikou tmimatos tis Makedonias prin kai meta tin antallagi ton plithismon" [The mother tongue of the inhabitantsin the Greek part of Macedonia before and after the Balkan Wars], *Theseis* (January-March 1992), 61.

Greek Macedonia was 3.5 higher, that is 140,000 instead of the official 41,000. Even Mr Lithoxoou, however, has been more cautious in dealing with figures. As far as the present size of the minority is concerned his verdict is that it must be ranging between 40,000 and 100,000. These figures are based on two social anthropologists: The former is an anonymous one, which, according to Malcolm, mentions a core of 40-70,000 "ethnic Macedonians" and an associated circle of roughly 100,000. The latter is A. Karakasidou, who wrote that 80% of the population of the Florina region are either Slav-speakers or descendants of Slav-speakers[15]. Two points must be made here: why are anthropologists considered by Malcolm a reliable source for figures? In fact Karakasidou mentioned explicitly that this percentage is not official and used the conditional form ("I would estimate") probably to express some doubt. But even if her figure was right, to move to the second point, descending from Slav-speakers does not make one necessarily an "ethnic Macedonian".

2.4. Anastasia Karakasidou's academic influence is also obvious in the report prepared by Panagiotis Dimitras (Minority Rights Group - Greece, MRG-GR), a paper heavily loaded with references to a rich but standardised bibliography. In particular MRG-GR reproduces roughly her theory on the classification of the population in Greek Macedonia[16]. Four groups of inhabitants are mentioned: (a) Those who have a "Macedonian" national (i.e. FYROM) identity; (b) those who identify themselves as neither Greek nor FYROM nationals and seek recognition of their cultural specificity; (c) the largest group, assimilated "Slav-Macedonians" with a Greek ethnic and national identity and (d) pure ethnic Greeks with a Macedonian Greek regional identity. Dimitras uses the term "Slavo-Macedonian" but throughout the report one can hardly

15. Malcolm estimated that the 80% refers to a population of 100,000 though the population of the Florina prefecture in 1981 was no more than 50,000.

16. It must be stated here that the views cited by MRG-GR, on the various ethnic identities in Greek Macedonia, are not substantiated nor do they form the main argument or the conclusions of Anastasia Karakasidou's paper on "Politicizing Culture: Negating Ethnic Identity in Greek Macedonia", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 11 (1993), 22-23 notes 2-3. It is also interesting that Karakasidou in the same article accepted that "the bulk of the population in Greek Macedonia is nothing less than Greek", but these views have never been quoted by anyone.

distinguish between the first and the second group (see for example p. 14 where he is referring to those identified with FYROM as "militant Slavomacedonians"). It is inevitable that in the mind of a careless reader by the end of the MRG-GR (i.e. Dimitras') report all groups have been unified into one, the "Slavomacedonians", who are classified as more or less militant but definitely not as ethnic Greek. All these contrary to the author's initial and explicit statement that the overwhelming majority of them claim the opposite (p. 7).

As in other NGO reports problems in terminology acquire additional importance when they are related to figures, estimates and censuses. MRG-GR, for example, makes reference to a Greek scholar, Professor Mavrogordatos, in order to question the validity of the official 1928 census which estimated Slav-speakers in Greece as few as 82,000. The report claims that "Slavomacedonians", according to the Greek scholar cited, were probably 200,000 (p. 12). But the full text used reads: "Contemporary Greek reports estimate that as many as 200,000 'Bulgarian'-speaking inhabitants live in Macedonia, of whom no more than 80,000-90,000 are considered to be lacking a Greek national consciousness..."[17]. Further on, if one checks Mavrogordatos' reference, he will find that he has cited two reports both by a high-school inspector submitted to the Association for the Dissemination of Greek Letters in Athens[18]. Regardless of the actual text and the questionable validity of its sources one is finally left with the impression that "Slavomacedonians" (whatever one thinks this term means) were roughly 200,000.

In the same fashion gross errors can be easily spotted when MRG-GR ventures to estimate the present size of the minority (p. 14). Its argument is based on four sources: (a) Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year 1987, which gives 180,000; (b) an anonymous ethnologist (apparently the same anthropologist mentioned by Malcolm), who gives 200,000; (c) Anthropologist Riki van Boeschoten gives 100-150,000; (d) "Conservative" Greek prefects, who talk of 100,000 Slavophones. The unexpected (to say the least) conclusion for MRG-GR is (p. 15):

17. George Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic. Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922-1936* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 247.

18. *Op.cit.*, p. 247 note 49.

"Therefore the 200,000 estimate for the Slavomacedonian community seems reasonable. Among them a minority of a few tens of thousands, a figure growing since the beginning of the recent Macedonian imbroglio, have a non-Greek consciousness". The last part of this conclusion is based on Karakasidou and Danforth, but if references to their articles are checked, then it becomes clear that none of the two says anything about "few tens of thousands" nor about "a growing figure".

3. The second pillar of the NGO reports is the alleged violent assimilatory policy implemented by the Greek state in Greek Macedonia. According to the observers the first period of such practices covered the span from the Balkan Wars to World War II. The main charges against the Greek state refer to its unfulfilled educational obligations towards the minority, to the change of Slavic surnames and toponymes names into Greek, to the abolishment of Slavic scripts, even to the prohibition of free expression in Slav-Macedonian and the deportation of Slav-speakers.

Some comments must be made on these accusations. The source of the observers on minority educational issues used is Hristo Andonofski (either directly or indirectly via Poulton)[19]. The same author is also used to substantiate the rest of the accusations, in addition to a FYROM state publication (Academy of Sciences and Arts, *Macedonia and its Relations with Greece*, Skopje, 1993)[20], and reports prepared by Greek Civil War political refugees or their descendants from Greek Macedonia now living in FYROM or in Australia (see for example Chris Popov and Michael Radin, *Contemporary Greek Government Policy on the Macedonian Issue and Discriminatory Practices in Breach of International Law*, Melbourne, 1989). The use of selective non-Greek sources by the aformentioned writers does not necessarily imply that the inter-war

19. Hristo Andonofski, a former Communist elementary school teacher from Edessa, who settled in Skopje after the Civil War, has published widely on these matters See: "The First Macedonian Primer between the Two World Wars-The Abecedar", *Macedonian Review*, 1 (1976), 65-69; "Makedonskoto Nacionalno Malcinstvo vo Grcija, Bulgarija i Albanija", *Glasnik*, 18/1 (1974), 40; "Abecedar-The Primer for the Macedonian Children in Aegean Macedonia", *Macedonian Review*, 18/1 (1988), 5-10.

20. The book has been severely criticised in Greece by Spyridon Sfetas and Kyriakos Kentrotis, "Skopje in Search of an Identity and International Recognition", *Balkan Studies*, 35/2 (1994), 337-377.

policy of the Greek state, especially under Metaxas' dictatorship, or, indeed, of many states in Europe during this period, was non-assimilationist. Nor does it imply that this policy, whatever it was, is justifiable. It is just one more an indication of the observers willingness to accept at face value all kinds of partisan allegation and also to use past practices in order to corroborate modern accusations.

Full acceptance of the sources, however, sometimes might be troublesome. Only few examples will suffice to show the shortcomings of an unreserved and perhaps ill-prepared case.

(a) Lois Whitman took for granted (p. 6 note 15) an undated report by the Association of Refugee Children from "Aegean Macedonia" which said that by Law No 87/1936 Slavic surnames had to be changed. Similar references are given by Popov and Radin. Still, all of our attempts to trace state laws calling for the change of surnames were in vain. And certainly the law cited is quite irrelevant to the subject mentioned. Non-Greek toponyms, however, names in Greek Macedonia were changed in the 1920s, following certain State guidelines, which were normally followed in such cases by nation-states.

(b) Malcolm as well as MRG-GR make reference to Karakasidou's above mentioned article to confirm charges for torture and ill-treatment of "anyone" who would speak "Slav-Macedonian". Karakasidou herself, however, does not provide such information; in her introduction she cites such an allegation, made during a conversation she had as an anthropologist, with one informer during field work in a grocer's store. Two NGOs have made a point implying massive harassment, based exclusively on that comment.

(c) References by MRG-GR to substantiate deportation of "many" Slav-speakers from Greek western Macedonia to Crete are based on citations from books by S. Kargakos, and A. Tounda-Fergadi. The first citation, to Kargakos, mentions a deportation from one village in Thrace; the second, to Fergadi, again refers to Thrace. Indeed deportation from Bulgarian villages along the railway line in Thrace took place during the last months and shortly after the Greek Army's Asia Minor campaign (1922), when Bulgarian armed bands were threatening the rear of the Greek Army. By any stress of the imagination these Bulgarian nationalists from Thrace could hardly qualify as Macedonians. Unfortunately it was impossible to check Whitman's point about the

deportation of 5,000 Slav-speakers from Greek western Macedonia during Metaxas' dictatorship. Poulton is again her source, but his reference is to the official *Istorijata na Makedonskiot Narod* [History of the Macedonian Nation] (Skopje, 1969, pp. 271-275) which lacks further references.

(d) The case of Abecedar, a Slav primer using Latin, not Cyrillic, characters produced in 1925 by the Greek state for Slav-speaking Greeks, is mentioned by all organisations because it was not forwarded to the villages in spite of Greece's international obligations. Had anyone done some real research on this he would have found that there are official interwar documents which testify that the books were indeed forwarded. But they were withdrawn after some noisy demonstrations took place, organised by the Slavophones themselves[21], rejecting the books as an insult to their Greek identity. But even if these demonstrations had not taken place and the books were successfully forwarded, the Slav-Macedonian, like any other traditional language, had few if any chances to compete effectively with the official state language which secures economic and social advancement.

One of course understands the sensitivity to infringements of human rights. Using however a country's past record on this question in the selective way that is being done these days raises questions about the motives of all these retrospective reports. When it comes to past infringements others would have been more appropriate targets. Isn't it reasonable to ask after all whether the tough post-war behaviour of Britain in the colonies, the persecution of Jews in inter-war Germany, the cleansing of Indians in 19th century U.S.A., the slaughter of Protestants in 16th century France and the expulsion of Muslims and Jews alike from 15th century Spain are monitored, re-evaluated and reassessed every year together with modern incidents of human rights violation in these countries?

4. Post-war evidence of terrorism exercised by the Greek state upon

21. See for example Istorikon Archeion Ypourgeiou ton Exoterikon [Foreign Ministry Historical Archives], file 1926//37 Ekpaideftika Slavophonon [The Education of the Slavophones], Police telegram to the Ministry of Defence, Sorovich 29 Jan. 1926, confidential No. 280/1. See also the easily accessible Thessaloniki newspaper *Ephimeris ton Valkanion*, 2 Feb. 1926.

Slav-speakers is no more accurate than the alleged inter-war infringements. The basic arguments are three:

(a) After the Greek Civil War[22], the villages or houses abandoned by Slav-speakers, were given to "nationally minded" citizens (else "with healthy national consciousness"). No villages are mentioned, no numbers, no records. Indeed transhumant pastoralists were settled only in few deserted villages (no more than a dozen) along the northern part of the Greek-Albanian border but the relative law made no reference whatsoever to their national loyalty. The inverted commas, which give the impression that the expression has been cited from official Greek sources, is a long story. On the issue of the alleged "colonization" both Malcolm (p. 6) and MRG-GR (p. 13) cited Poulton[23]. Poulton has copied (and translated) the very expression from Mojsov ("so zdrava nacionalna svest")[24]. Mojsov, in his turn, cited a conversation between two Greek Ministers during a debate in a parliamentary sub- committee for foreign affairs in the mid 1950s; but he did not mention his source. Therefore cross-checking is impossible.

(b) The establishment of kindergartens and nurseries was deliberate in order to accelerate the promotion of the Greek language among Slav-speakers. The importance of such institutions for educational or social reasons is obvious but it does not necessarily indicate that they were designed for the alleged purpose since the measure was implemented nation wide. In addition no observer is willing to consider other factors which might explain in a different way the implementation of such a policy within agriculturists, e.g. shortage of manpower, due to overseas emigration, calls for more intensive work of housewives in the fields.

22. It is interesting to note that observers willingly accept that during World War II and the Greek Civil War parts of the Slav-speaking regions were under Communist control, without asking the critical questions, whether and why there was a special link between Slav-Macedonian nationalism and Communism. Indeed, it is obvious that all observers have little if any knowledge at all of that period. MRG-GR uses Mavrogordatos interwar study and Poulton (citing Popovski). Whitman makes reference to a six page irrelevant article by Danforth. Poulton gives a three book bibliography but no page numbers which would at least indicate that he had read any part of them. It is better to be considered as a bibliography for further reading rather than sources employed.

23. Malcolm wrongly thinks that the expression was used in the decree.

24. Mojsov Lazo, *Okoly prasaneto na makedonskoto nacionalno malcinstvo vo Grcija* (Skopje, 1954), p. 17.

(c) Peasants in Greek Western Macedonia were forced to take a public oath, declaring they would never use their mother Slavic tongue again. Whitman says (p. 8) that such ceremonies took place in "several" villages and (p. 40 note 59) "in the villages around Lerin, Kostur and Kajlari the inhabitants were asked to confirm...". MRG-GR says in "many" villages, and Poulton that "villagers were asked to make public declarations" (p. 6). MRG-GR is drawing information from Greek newspapers, Malcolm from Poulton, Poulton from Andonofski (who also talks about "several" villages)[25], Whitman from Danforth, Danforth from Stoyan Pribichevitch[26], Pribichevitch from the American Consul General in Thessaloniki, and the last one most likely from the Greek newspaper *Ellinikos Vorras* (July 8, 1959, August 5, 1959, August 11, 1959). In fact such oaths were indeed taken by villagers after church service under yet unknown circumstances, probably at the initiative of local officials. Apparently they were discontinued once they became known to authorities in Athens. But the villages were definitely no more than three out of a total of 2,500 communities scattered in Greek Macedonia[27].

5. Obviously the most significant accusations refer to the treatment of minorities after the restoration of Democracy in Greece in 1974. To corroborate these accusation the four NGO reports list at least 17 judicial cases against "Macedonian" activists. Such cases are also named in the State Department 1991-1994 reports; six cases are mentioned by Poulton, four by Danforth and one by Karakasidou. The record appears depressing indeed, not to mention additional allegations for ethnic discrimination in the army, in the public sector, in education, preferential treatment of refugee descendants at the expense of the indigenous peasants, even attempts to change toponyms and to hinder the public use of the Slaviv dialect. Under these seemingly appalling circumstances —testified to also by Whitman, MRG-GR, and Siesby— the Interna-

25. Andonofski, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

26. Stoyan Pribichevitch, *Macedonia: its People and History* (Pennsylvania State University, 1982), pp. 245-247.

27. Additional arguments for past suppression can be found in Malcolm's report such as the claim that Slav-speakers were dismissed from public services in 1954 etc. Needless to say Poulton (i.e. Andonofski) is the only source.

tional Helsinki Federation decided to include some extremely negative comments about Greece in its annual report for 1993 (see pp. 57-58).

It must be understood in advance that during the five year period covered by the afore mentioned reports cases against Slav-Macedonian activists taken into court were four in all and involve three individuals (Mr Christos Sidiropoulos, Mr Anastasios Boulis, Mr (ex-rev.) Nikodimos Tsarknias) and one association (where Mr Sidiropoulos and Boulis were also involved). To put it in a different way these cases are not typical examples; they constitute the whole record available. This critique is not to apologise for any unfair persecution nor will it defend either the Greek judicial system or the Ministry for Justice. But it must be stressed that numerous cancellations and appeals to higher courts, year after year, have artificially increased the record. Moreover, the same record was unjustifiably overloaded by extra references to cases which are related to the recent rise of national feelings in Greece but not to the activists' actions or welfare. It is also astonishing that observers have failed to notice that the involvement of the state in these trials has been minimal. In fact, in almost all cases taken to court, relevant or irrelevant to minority rights, complainants were private individuals[28]. They also failed to make clear that not a single activist in these trials has been imprisoned or served any sentence.

In the category of legal problems one could possibly include the cases of Law 3370/1955 on the Greek nationality and Ministerial decree No 106841/29 Dec. 1982 on the free repatriation and return to Greek citizenship of political refugees of the Greek Civil War of 1946-1949. They both accept as a criterion of implementation the ethnic identity (*genos*) of the citizens and apparently contradict the Greek Constitution. For this reason they are considered by the aformentioned reports as indispensable evidence for the unfair treatment of ethnic minorities in Greece. A better understanding of these laws requires a deep knowledge

28. The only exception is the case of Mr Tsarknias who was persecuted by the authorities for wearing the cloth after being officially defrocked. However, Mr Tsarknias has not been defrocked because he had claimed a Macedonian ethnic identity. Strangely the opposite view has been supported by Hugh Poulton in his work "The Rest of the Balkans", *Minority Rights in Europe*, Hugh Miall (ed.), (Chatham House Papers: London, 1994), p. 81 and note 19 although his reference is to the *Macedonian Information Centre bulletin*, 26 Oct. 1992, that is three months before the final decision of the Church.

of the Macedonian Question and its special and complex relation to the Greek Civil War, when Greek Macedonia became the target of Yugoslav territorial expansionism using Slav-Macedonian activists in Greece as a vehicle for these aspirations. Fears associated with the danger from that direction die hard. Only in such a historically informed context may one evaluate —not necessarily justify— the function of such laws and decrees in Greece. Unfortunately observers are reluctant to understand and explain but more apt to judge and condemn.

Alongside these legal problems one can trace in all reports a second distinct category of arguments which aim to substantiate current discrimination against Slav-Macedonians in all aspects of everyday life:

— One complained that during his military service someone has called him an "agent from Skopje", because his place of origin was a Slav-speaking village.

— One activist resigned from public service when he was transferred to an island.

— Two entrepreneurs complained that their clients vanished when they became actively involved in minority affairs.

— Another said that his child was harassed at school by its classmates for having spoken in Slav-Macedonian on teachers' orders.

— In one dispute over land rights between two communities, which has already been taken into court, some expect, even before the trial, that the court decision will favour the village of Greek speakers and not the one of Slav-speakers.

— Once a local festival was interrupted by a prefect who disapproved of Slav-Macedonian songs.

— One village name was changed from Slavic into Greek.

Very much alike the first category, all these cases have one point in common: they are unique and not typical cases which have been publicised by the same persons, that is those implicated in the trials.

Weak or rare cases like the above do not imply that all evidence from the handfull of activists should be dismissed *a priori*. But they do suggest that given the provenance and the extremely limited number of cases occasionally, observers should be more cautious. Most of them, for example, have bitten the bullet about a 1982 Greek national security service document urging not to employ "Slav-speakers" in the public services in the Florina region (Greek Western Macedonia). The docu-

ment was partly published in a journal issued by the Society for Minority Rights (i.e. MRG-GR). Among those who had worked for the preparation of that issue (No 1, January 1992) were Mr Dimitras, the writer of the 1994 report and Mr Lithoxoou. The same document was also published as an annex to the proceedings of a public debate where Mr Lithoxoou and other MRG members had actively participated[29]. All observers agree[30] that this well known document is sufficient evidence for official discrimination against Slav-speakers. Had observers asked Mr Dimitras and Mr Lithoxoou to have the whole document translated for them they would have been surprised to read that, in one of the last paragraphs, it recommends the preferential employment of Slav-speakers in all public services, and particularly in the Army, the Security Services and elsewhere. Be that as it may, the alleged report —if one does not contest its authenticity— appears to be a series of recommendations by a public security official. There is hardly any evidence that they were ever transformed into government policy. A similar blunder can also be traced in Malcolm's report (p. 11): he wrongly thought that the "Rainbow" party was excluded by the Greek Supreme Court from the 1994 European Parliament Elections and he commented this decision as a "political mistake" because he said, "even the Ouranos (i.e. the "Rainbow") spokesman did not expect his list to receive more than 20,000 votes". In 48 hours the Court's decision was repealed and indeed the "Rainbow", supported by some minor splinter Communist parties, took part in the elections and received approximately 7.200 votes nation-wide. The result made clear once again how mistaken observers' speculations can be when they take all activist information at face value.

6. Once again it must be stated that this critique is not intended as a challenge to the apparent ideological obstacles that an ethnic nation-state like Greece faces when it has to deal with minority issues, but to stress that international observers have failed to give an objective view of the minority question in Greece. Basically this was due to a general

29. Dimitris Lithoxoou et allii, *Ellinikos Ethnikismos, Makedoniko Zitima: I ideologiki chrisi tis istorias* [Greek nationalism, Macedonian Question: the ideological use of history] (Athens, 1992), p. 75.

30. MRG-GR, p. 15; Whitman, p. 45 note 69; Malcolm, p. 8 coping Whitman.

misinterpretation of ethnicity in the Balkans. In this region ethnic identities have been constructed rather recently (in fact it is a still on-going process in certain countries) not exactly on linguistic foundations and they do not denote people of the same national origin, as many Americans would have thought, judging from their own U.S. experience. Thus, the distinct Slavic dialect spoken in certain villages in Greek Macedonia does not necessarily certify the existence of an ethnic minority. However, some additional short-comings which are found in abundance in these reports must be clarified more explicitly:

(a) Testimonies and various data concerning the past and the present of Slav-speakers have been derived only from activist sources. In fact there is not even one single argument, piece of information, citation or reference of those employed by the observers, which can not be found in the activists' publications. On the contrary, opposite views and data are in exremely short supply.

(b) Most of these data have initially been published in FYROM, sometimes even by ultra nationalist circles, but this does not seem to undermine their validity at all, as far as NGOs are concerned. All information available is taken at its face value.

(c) Articles and other sources in English reproduce the same kind of data originating most of the times from the very same FYROM sources, a fact which foreign observers seem to have failed to notice or have disregarded completely.

(d) MRG-GR members, minority activists, the documents' producers, the writers of the reference articles, "Rainbow" party members, observers, interviewers, victims, and informers are the same individuals, members of a small community who cooperate cordially for the reproduction of the necessary "evidence".

(e) All reports seem to rely more on past than on present evidence of human rights violation, a tendency which cannot be tracked in similar reports on other countries.

(f) Present data included in the reports tend to reproduce older but not always standing stereotypes (e.g. locals vs. refugees); as they are insufficient they are artificially increased by mixing various cases only indirectly connected with the minority issues concerned. This is known as "patchwork fallacy". The use of terms like "in one example" (Whitman, p. 40), "some attempts" (Malcolm, p. 9), "some", "from time to

time", "often" (MRG-GR, p. 15) tend to imply that the cases refered are indicative, typical or the most striking examples available. Indeed they are unique.

(g) A variety of major or minor errors and a reluctance to deal with some revealing aspects of the Macedonian Question (for example the Communist factor) reveals that observers tend simply to reproduce a standardised file of xeroxed leaflets, pamphlets, articles and other translated documents given to them. But they do refrain from carrying any research at all which might change their clean-cut view (evil state vs. suppressed peasants) which is indispensable in order to substantiate prefixed ideas and biased conclusions.

It is obvious from the above that the reports in question have not been written simply to inform. In fact some statements and comments which have been included —occasionally pompous and more suitable to politicians rather than to observers— make it clear that these NGOs feel confident enough to urge even the implementation of an unfavourable policy towards Greece based on their reports. Apparently, as it was asserted in the first paragraph of this study, the preparation and the publication of these reports is by no means irrelevant to the charged atmosphere of the Balkan crisis nor to Greece's policy vis-à-vis Milosevic's Serbia and the recognition of FYROM by its neighbours. It could also be pointed out that by blaming Greece, NGOs "balance" smoothly their critique for more severe minority violations in Greece's neighbourhood (i.e. in Albania, FYROM, Bulgaria and Turkey). Finally it could be argued reasonably that NGOs are working for the protection of minorities and are pro-minority by definition. Bearing also in mind some diplomats' and NGO activists' support of small states, the criticism of alleged Greece's minority policy is easily interpreted after all, especially in the context of the lengthy and acute dispute between Athens and Skopje. But, on the other hand, FYROM diplomats and politicians exploit the very same reports as internationally recognised and neutral views to support their minority claims against Greece. Therefore, it should be emphasized, that assisting the democratization and economic development of small and weak states does not necessarily require the direct or indirect justification of their irredentist claims as well.

Concluding, the authors of this critique would like to make clear that their comments as to the shortcomings of the particular reports under review, should in no way be interpreted as a degradation of the role played by NGOs in general, for the protection of human and minority rights. This function is both necessary and important as a supplement to the role of international organizations like the UN, the OSCE or the Council of Europe. But indeed, in view of the fulfilment of this task, NGOs should maintain a high degree of credibility and objectivity. The arguments presented in this critique aim to promote this objective.

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