

V L A S I S V L A S I D I S

THE "MACEDONIAN QUESTION" ON THE BULGARIAN POLITICAL
SCENE (1919-23)¹

With the signing of the Treaties of Bucharest and Neuilly, which ended the Balkan Wars and the First World War respectively, Greece regarded the "Macedonian Question" as closed. The same was not true of Bulgaria, however, who had been the great loser in all the confrontations over the occupation of Macedonia since the beginning of the century. For Bulgaria, the "Macedonian Question" remained open throughout the interwar period and engaged the interest not only of the political parties but also of all those agencies who were in a position to exercise any sort of influence at home and abroad. This study examines the effect of the "Macedonian Question" on the Bulgarian political scene, each party's policy towards the problem, and the effects of this policy on its progress. Particular attention is also paid to such extra-parliamentary forces as the Macedonian refugee organisations in Bulgaria, the Macedonian Committees, the armed forces, and the royal family, in an endeavour to present the "Macedonian Question" not only as an issue of Balkan diplomacy but also as a focal point of the internal political developments in the Bulgarian kingdom.

The party which dominated the Bulgarian political scene in the period in question was the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU). It was headed by Alexander Stamboliiski, a charismatic leader who promised the much desired agrarian reform, domestic tranquillity, and economic recovery. In the first post-war parliamentary elections, held in 1919, BANU garnered the most votes, though it lacked an absolute majority. This it achieved in the elections held the following year². It continued to meet with an enthusiastic

1. This paper is taken from the writer's yet unfinished thesis "The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation between the Wars (1918-29) and its Activity in Greek Macedonia". For the scholarship which enabled me to produce this paper, I am grateful to the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle. My thanks are also due to Professor John S. Koliopoulos and Dr Basil C. Gounaris for their valuable comments.

2. In the first elections BANU won 85 parliamentary seats, against 47 for the Communists, 38 for the Socialists, 28 for Malinov's Democrats, and 19 for Teodorov's Narod-

response from the electorate throughout its term of government; indeed, the results of the local elections held in 1921³ and the parliamentary elections held in 1923⁴ indicate that its popularity increased during this time.

As far as foreign policy was concerned, the Stamboliiski government's aims focused on the question of renegotiating Bulgaria's war reparations and acquiring a geographical or economic outlet to the Aegean. To achieve the latter goal, Stamboliiski sought to further Bulgaria's demands by attending such international conferences as those held at Geneva (April-May 1922) and Lausanne (late 1922-early 1923) and also from the forum of the General Assembly of the League of Nations. Bulgaria had joined the League with the concurrence of the other Balkan nations, but this did not mean that the Great Powers supported Bulgaria's revisionary demands⁵. The reasons for this failure lay in Bulgaria's lack of international support during the period in question and in the fact that Greece was involved in a war with Turkey in order to force Turkey to accept the terms of the Treaty of Sevres.

The Great Powers' imminent refusal to satisfy Bulgaria's aspirations prompted Stamboliiski to take steps towards reaching an understanding with Serbia with the aim of uniting Yugoslavia and Bulgaria as a federation. For the sake of these aims the Stamboliiski government was prepared to sacrifice all Bulgarian claims on Yugoslav Macedonia and to agree to the occupation of Thessaloniki by Yugoslavia in exchange for a Bulgarian outlet to the Aegean in Thrace⁶.

niaks. Six months later, in March 1920, BANU won 110 seats, the Communists 50, the Socialists 9, the Democrats 24, the Narodniaks 14, the Progressive Liberals 9, the Radicals 8, Gennadiev's National Liberals 3, and Petrov's National Liberals 3. For a full account of the election results, see D. Petrova, *Samostoiatelno upravlenie na BZNS 1920-1923* [The One Party Rule of the BANU (1920-1923)], Sofia 1988, pp. 33, 85.

3. Αρχείο Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών (AYE) [Foreign Ministry Archives]/Κεντρική Υπηρεσία (ΚΥ) [Central Department], A/1921, A/5/XII/(1), Telegram from Panouryias to Foreign Ministry, Sofia, 21 Oct. 1921, No. 5497.

4. In the elections held on 22 April 1923 BANU won 53.92% of the vote and 212 parliamentary seats. The Bulgarian Communist Party won 19.3% and 16 seats, the Constitutional Bloc 18.28% and 15 seats, and the Social Democrats 2.64% and 2 seats (R. J. Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria*, London 1987, p. 97).

5. USA National Archives (henceforth NA), SD Decimal File M 363/27, C. Wilson to Secretary of State, Sofia, 10 Dec. 1922, f. 197. V. Bozinov, "Bulgaria na konferentsite v Genya i Lozana (1922-1923)" [Bulgaria to the Conferences of Geneva and Lozanne], *V tsest na akademik Hristo A. Hristov, Iz sledvania po slytsai 60 godini ot rozdenieto my* [In Honour of the Academician Hristo A. Hristov. From Studies on the Occasion of the Sixtieth Anniversary of His Birth], Sofia 1976, pp. 321-2, 327-37; Crampton, *op. cit.*, 92.

6. AYE/KY, A/1920, A/5/XII/(5), Military Mission in Bulgaria to General Staff.

The negotiations began in 1920 and went on until 1923, with the Serbs repeatedly withdrawing owing to the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO) and other Bulgarian agencies' opposition to the policy. The Serbs' condition for a successful outcome to the talks was the conclusive cessation of IMRO's terrorist activity in Yugoslav Macedonia⁷. The two sides eventually reached an agreement at Nish in March 1923. The Stamboliiski-Pasich declaration obliged Bulgaria to renounce all claims to Macedonia, to wipe out the Macedonian organisations on Bulgarian soil, and to support a Yugoslav outlet to Thessaloniki. Yugoslavia would support a Bulgarian outlet to the Aegean and defend the Bulgarian government's policy both at home and abroad⁸.

As a consequence of BANU's hopes of reaching an agreement with Yugoslavia, the party adopted a ~~chilly~~ attitude towards the Executive Committee of the Macedonian Brotherhoods⁹ and made every effort to quell IMRO's activities on Yugoslav territory. Specifically, it sought to reduce the Executive Committee's power and influence by integrating the refugees into Bulgarian society. It was for this purpose, indeed, that it created the relevant department of the Ministry of the Interior, the head of which was Alexander Dimitrov, a select BANU cadre and loyal supporter of Stamboliiski¹⁰.

In his efforts to stamp on IMRO's activities Stamboliiski resorted by turns to force, persuasion, and promises. At the end of 1919 he arrested and imprisoned IMRO's leaders, Protogerov and Alexandrov, together with numerous other Macedonian Committee cadres; but the leaders escaped with typical ease. Subsequently, Stamboliiski even tried to use the army against IMRO, but it would not carry out his orders. In 1921 he changed the leadership of the army and of the police in the Petrich area and replaced the

Information bulletin 24 Mar. - 21 Apr. 1920, Sofia, 22 Apr. 1920, No 336 confidential. AYE/KY, A/1920-1921, A/5/(25), Greek Legation in Bulgaria to Foreign Ministry, Sofia, 13/26 Jan. 1921, No 50 confidential. AYE/KY, A/1921, A/5/XII/(15), Telegram from Panouryas to Foreign Ministry, Sofia, 9/27 Mar. 1921. NA, SD Decimal File M 363/27, C. Wilson to Secretary of State, Sofia, 10 Dec. 1922, f. 197.

7. E. Barker, *Macedonia: Its Place in Balkan Power Politics*, London 1950, pp. 24-5.

8. B. J. Whetstine, "Bulgarian Interwar Politics and the Military Solution: The Coups d'Etat of 1923 and 1934", *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 16/3 (1988), 85. S. Troebst, "Die IMPO als Objekt der Einheitsfrontstrategie von Komintern und sowjetrussischer Diplomatie in den Jahren 1923-4" (unpublished postgraduate dissertation, Berlin, 1979, p. 49). Barker, *op. cit.*, 25.

9. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 45.

10. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 47.

guards at the border outposts; but again to little effect¹¹. His inability to combat IMRO effectively led him to conclude a secret agreement with the organisation in 1921, the terms being that IMRO would curtail its activities on Yugoslav territory, while the government would grant tacit support for IMRO action in Greek Macedonia. The agreement would remain in force for the duration of the Bulgaro-Yugoslav talks, which had started up again in the meantime¹². As it turned out, this was not long. IMRO soon began its activities again, and the Stamboliiski government was obliged to condemn a number of comitadjis to death and to pass a law in the *Sobranje* [Parliament] against brigandage, while any citizen who was away from home for more than twenty days and could not account for where he had been was sent to prison¹³. In spite of IMRO, the talks went well and the agreement was eventually signed at Nish; which boded ill not only for the organisation's political line, but also for its very existence. Thus, in the summer of 1921, IMRO no longer had any reason to refuse to be involved in the *coup d'état* which toppled BANU from power and resulted in Stamboliiski's assassination.

The Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (BWSDP), one of the oldest parties in Bulgaria¹⁴, was the first attempt at political representation by Bulgarian leftwing forces. However, conflicting tendencies within the party pulled it apart in 1903. The split resulted in two parties: the "broad" and the "narrow" Socialists, which latter, after the First World War, changed their name to the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP)¹⁵.

The "broad" Socialists, who were advocates of West European Social Democracy, were well received by the Bulgarian people up to the First World War. The party remained strong in the first post-war election, but in subsequent elections it did so poorly that in 1923 it had only two representatives

11. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/V/(5), Greek Military Mission in Bulgaria. Information bulletin, 8 Nov. 1919. AYE/KY, A/1920, A/5/XII/(1), Military Mission in Bulgaria to General Staff, Sofia, 7 July 1920, No 661 confidential. Whetstone, *op. cit.*, 85.

12. AYE/KY, A/1921, A/5/XII/(15), Telegram from Panouryias to Foreign Ministry, Sofia, 20 May/2 June 1921, No 3148.

13. Foreign Office - Public Record Office (henceforth FO) 421/303, Article from the newspaper *Preporod* [Advise] (10 Nov. 1922), enclosure in confidential report No 82, Alban Young to Earl Curzon, Belgrade, 16 Nov. 1922.

14. Concerning the BWSDP's institutive meeting, which took place on 20 July 1891 at Buzludja on Mount Stara Planina, see *Ιστορία του Κομμουνιστικού Κόμματος Βουλγαρίας* [History of the Bulgarian Communist Party], Sofia 1977, p. 20.

15. *Ιστορία*, 35-6.

in the *Sobranje*¹⁶. The reasons for the BWSDP's fall from popularity may be sought both in the general crisis which afflicted all the Socialist parties after the Bolshevik revolution and the creation of separate Communist parties throughout Europe, and in its unfortunate attitude towards BANU. Specifically, instead of acknowledging the democratic nature of the Stamboliiski government and behaving like a responsible opposition party, the BWSDP denounced BANU as an exponent of tyranny and refused to have anything to do with it on a party level¹⁷.

Needless to say, the BWSDP's reduced electoral strength must also have had something to do with the various positions it had adopted in the foreign policy sector. To be precise, the Bulgarian Social Democrats had espoused the West European Socialists' theory that peace should prevail on a pan-European and a local level; with the result that they opposed both the Turco-Italian War of 1911 and the Balkan Wars of 1912-13¹⁸. According to the Social Democrats, the only way to maintain peace in the Balkans was for all the Balkan states, including the European part of the Ottoman Empire, to join together in a single state entity in the form of a federation. Within this Balkan federation the various peoples would live in peace and mutual respect¹⁹.

In principle, this policy was also maintained after the end of the First World War. But the hatred between the Balkan peoples persisted, and when the peace treaties had been signed and the borders fixed, the concept of the Balkan federation became unfeasible and was discreetly shelved. The BWSDP believed that the Bulgarian people were tired of constant wars and wanted only peace, and so it set the preservation of peace as its principal foreign policy goal. But the results of the 1923 elections showed that the voters had forsaken the BWSDP for BANU and the Communist Party, both of which maintained

16. For the results of the parliamentary elections of this period, see Petrova, *op. cit.*, 33, 85, 337.

17. B. Grigorov, "Sotsialdemokratitseskata partia v Bulgaria (Fevryari 1924-Oktovri 1926 g.)" [The Social-Democratic Party in Bulgaria (February 1924 - October 1926)], *Vtressnata politika na Bulgaria prez kapitalizma (1878-1944)* [The Home Policy of Bulgaria during Capitalism (1878-1944)], Sofia 1980, p. 203.

18. L. Bushkoff, "Marxism, Communism and the Revolutionary Tradition in the Balkans 1878-1914: An Analysis and an Interpretation", *East European Quarterly*, 1 (1967-8), 385. L. A. D. Dellin, "Politics and Political Organizations", *Bulgaria: A Volume in the Mid-European Studies Center Series*, London 1957, p. 109. D. Zografski, "Die zweite Internationale und die Balkan-Sozialisten", *Papers Presented at the Vth International Congress of South-East European Research Studies*, Skopje 1988, pp. 68-9.

19. Dellin, *op. cit.*, 109. Zografski, *op. cit.*, 67.

an aggressive stance over the "Macedonian Question". So when the *coup* took place on the 9 June 1923, the Social Democrats decided to support the junta and eventually to play a part in the Tsankov government, represented by Dino Kazasov from the Party's Central Committee²⁰.

The Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) was the continuator of the party of the "narrow" Socialists. At their twenty-second party conference in May 1919, the "narrow" Socialists voted to become a Communist party and adopted a manifesto similar to that of the Bolsheviks²¹. From the start, the BCP maintained strong links with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with the result that Bulgarian Communists held high positions in the Comintern and Soviet policy was frequently given its first airing by the BCP²².

Although the Bulgarian working class was relatively small, in all the elections held during the period in question the BCP came second to BANU, garnering some 20% of the votes²³. In order to make an effective bid for power, the BCP needed to win over the tens of thousands of refugees who had come to Bulgaria from Macedonia; these remained loyal to the Macedonian Committees and their vote was a decisive factor in political developments in Bulgaria. So the BCP tried to formulate a policy on the "Macedonian Question" which would take political realities into account. These realities amounted to the fact that Bulgaria was a defeated country and was therefore unable dynamically to integrate ethnic Bulgarians from abroad within the borders of the Bulgarian state. Moreover, the BCP's policy had to be consistent with the Communist ideology relating to the co-existence of neighbouring

20. B. Grigorov, "Prominent Figures of the International Socialist Movement and the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (United) (1923-1941)", *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 3/2 (1975), 4.

21. E. Atanasova, *Vrzki i vzaimootnossenia mezdy Bulgarskite i Srbskite socialisti 1895-1919 godina* [Relations et rapports reciproques entre les socialistes Bulgares et Serbes (1895-1919)], Sofia 1968, p. 202.

22. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/V/(1), The political situation in Bulgaria, enclosure in a Foreign Ministry document to Politis, Athens, 2 May 1919, No 4261 confidential. Dellin, *op. cit.*, 112.

23. In the elections held in August 1919, the BCP won 119,000 votes (18%) and elected 47 representatives. In 1920 its share of the vote rose to 20% and it gained 50 parliamentary seats; while in January 1923, although it retained 19.3% of the overall vote, its parliamentary strength fell to 16 seats, owing to a change in the electoral system. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/V/(5), Vice-General Mazarakis, head of the Mission, to Foreign Ministry, Sofia, 7 Aug. 1919, No 511 confidential. AYE/KY, A/1920, A/5/XII/(1), Military Mission in Bulgaria. Information bulletin 26 Feb. - 23 Mar. 1920, Sofia, 22 Mar. 1920. Crampton, *op. cit.*, 97, Bushkoff, *op. cit.*, 395-6.

peoples within a single state structure²⁴. This quest led to the adoption of IMRO's policy, with regard to both longterm aims and everyday practice, adapted in both cases, needless, to say to Leninist models.

So the BCP espoused the cause of autonomy for Macedonia, Thrace, and Dobroudja within the context of a Balkan federation, to which all the Balkan states would belong after the Socialist revolution had won them over²⁵. At the same time, the party was bringing all its influence to bear at the meetings of the Balkan Communist Federation (BCF) to ensure that the decisions taken accorded with its own positions. It is worth noting that for the first few years after the War the BCP regarded the Slavonic-speaking population of Macedonia as part of the Bulgarian nation and the efforts for Macedonian autonomy as a means of rescuing ethnic Bulgarians from the neighbouring countries²⁶.

This policy brought the BCP into conflict with the other Communist parties in the Balkans, particularly the Yugoslav Communist Party (YCP). So, at the Comintern's urging, at the BCF's fifth conference the BCP described Macedonia's Slavonic-speaking population not as a Bulgarian ethnic minority, but as a separate nationality, like the Croats and the Albanians²⁷. It clung to this arbitrary stance even after the fall of Stamboliiski and the ineffectual BCP coup of September 1923. The reason this time was the BCP's attempt to win IMRO over and make common cause against the Tsankov government. To this purpose, Vasil Kollarov, Secretary-General of the Comintern, brought his high rank to bear in November 1923 to persuade the sixth BCF conference to adopt a text which stated that the "Macedonian" people wished to be regarded as a nationality and to have their own separate territory independent of other nations. These efforts culminated in the recognition of the people of Pirin's right to secede from Bulgaria and either to become part of the future "Macedonian state" or to be autonomous²⁸. Ultimately,

24. V. Vasilev, "Bulgarskata komynistsketa partia i makedonskiat vpros (1919-1934)" [Bulgarian Communist Party and the Macedonian Question (1919-1934)], *Bulgarskiat natsionalen vpros sled berlinskia kongres (1878-1914)*, [Bulgaria's National Problem after the Congress of Berlin (1878-1914)], Sofia 1986, pp. 175-6.

25. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/V/(1), Proclamation by the extreme Socialists of Bulgaria, "National House, Lions' Square", 30 April 1919, enclosure in Foreign Ministry document to Politis, Athens, 2 May 1919, No 4261 confidential. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/V/(5), Proclamation by the Bulgarian Communist Party (Narrow Socialists), 24 Sept. 1919.

26. Vasilev, *op. cit.*, 177-8.

27. Vasilev, *op. cit.*, 179.

28. Vasilev, *op. cit.*, 179-80.

the BCP's approach to IMRO was a failure, because IMRO was dominated by forces which were hostile to the idea of joining up with the Communists.

As well as its policies, the BCP also tried to imitate IMRO's handling of the refugees in Bulgaria. In May 1920, on the initiative of Dimo Hadjdimov, the party began creating organisations for working-class refugees from Macedonia, and a few months later the foundations were laid for the formation of the Union of Communist Refugees "Liberation". These organisations did not manage to attract many refugees, however, because it was a prerequisite that members belong to the working class²⁹; and this failure furnished one more reason for the BCP to try to win over IMRO.

In conclusion, until the failed *coup d'état* of September 1923, the BCP tried to win power through an erroneous implementation of the Leninist policy of the united front both at the top level —by trying to force the Balkan Communist parties to accept its own views on the "Macedonian Question" via the BCF— and at the grass-roots level— by creating refugee organisations. These efforts failed because the other Communist parties were not prepared to give up their share of the vote so that the BCP could come to power, nor would the refugees desert IMRO for the BCP. Tsankov's *coup* took the BCP completely by surprise. Trapped in its firm conviction that BANU was an oligarchic party, it chose to remain neutral during the crucial days of the *coup*. The criticism it received for this from the Comintern ultimately led to a second wrong decision, to put up armed resistance to the Tsankov regime. The BCP's own ill-prepared *putsch* was received with indifference by the Bulgarian people, with the result that it was crushed mainly by the armed forces of IMRO. Thus the BCP was outlawed and most of its cadres fled the country. Amidst this debacle, the party did its best to win allies, even if their ideologies differed. At the end of 1923, IMRO's and the BCP's converging views on the "Macedonian Question" led the Bulgarian Communists to do all in their power to effect a rapprochement with IMRO, even going so far as to espouse the IMRO's most extreme positions. But there was no reason why IMRO should share its dominion either over Pirin or over the refugee organisations: rather than allying itself with a party which, for ideological reasons, would sooner or later turn against it, IMRO preferred Tsankov to remain in power. So the BCP's final move came to nothing.

29. Vasilev, *op. cit.*, 187-8. D. Vlahov, *Moments za historija od makedonskiot narod* [Moments of the History of the Macedonian Nation] (mimeographed Greek trans. publ. by Institute for Balkan Studies), vol. 2, p. 235. K. Bitoski, "Simeon Kavrakirov: The Leader of IMRO (United) in Bulgaria", *Macedonian Review*, 19 (1989), 25.

In this period the bourgeois forces were very fragmented and gaining an extremely limited electoral response. The principal parties were Malinov's Democrats and Teodorov's Narodniaks (Nationalists); and there were also the Progressives under Danev, the Radicals led by Kosturkov, and the Liberals, who had been split into three parties since before the First World War. These parties' limited representation in the *Sobranje*³⁰ was due, of course, to the conflicts between them, but above all it was a consequence of Bulgaria's defeat in the First World War. The bourgeois parties, some wholeheartedly, others with reservations, had regarded Bulgaria's participation in the War on Germany's side as an opportunity to overturn the Treaty of Bucharest and to expand Bulgaria into Macedonia and Dobroudja. All the bourgeois political parties had held government posts during the First World War and each of them bore some of the blame for the frustration felt by a nation which had fought for several years and now had nothing more to show for it than two national disasters³¹.

Although they differed on various ideological issues, the bourgeois parties were in agreement over the "Macedonian Question": Macedonia was Bulgarian territory and every effort should be made to incorporate it into the Bulgarian state. However, Bulgaria's unfavourable position at the end of the First World War made this an impossible aim to realise. So they opted to seek protection for the Bulgarian minorities living in neighbouring countries³² or generally to press for the revision of the Treaty of Neuilly³³, without, however, abandoning the ultimate aim of Macedonia's being absorbed into the Bulgarian state. The coincidence of the bourgeois parties' views on foreign policy issues, coupled with their terror at the Bulgarian people's steadily increasing support for BANU (which was following a totally different line in domestic and foreign affairs) led to the formation of a powerful opposition. At

30. In the 1919 elections, the Democrats won 28 parliamentary seats, the Narodniaks 19, the Progressives and the Liberals 8, and the Radicals 3 (Petrova, *op. cit.*, 33). A year later, the situation scarcely changed: the Democrats won 24 seats, the Narodniaks 14, the Radicals 8, and the Progressive Liberals 9 (Petrova, *op. cit.*, 85).

31. FO 421/297, Confidential report No 85, Harry Lamb to Earl Curzon, Sofia, 24 Aug. 1919.

32. Archives microfilmes des affaires étrangères (henceforth AMAE), Europe 1918-1940, Bulgarie, vol. 22, Liberal Party Conference, Conference programme, enclosure to Supreme Commander of (French) Armed Forces, 2nd Bureau, Information Department, Bulgaria, 19 Dec. 1920, f. 56.

33. AMAE, Europe 1918-1940, Bulgarie, vol. 29, M. Clement-Cimon to Raymond Poincaré, Belgrade, 20 June 1922, ff. 210-11.

the same time a search was going on for allies outside the political and party sphere.

It was the Narodniaks and the Progressives who took the first step: after talks, they decided to join forces as a single party and call themselves the National Progressives. But it was no easy matter to unite all the bourgeois parties. An initial meeting of representatives of all the parties to discuss the formation of an alliance against Stamboliiski in September 1920 had no conclusive results³⁴. Early in 1921, the National Progressives tried to reach an agreement with the other large opposition party, the Democrats³⁵. The latter were not averse to a general collaboration between the bourgeois parliamentary forces; but they considered it more important to cultivate a close relationship with the Military League and to maintain their old ties with the Macedonian refugee associations³⁶. These forces belonged to an rather unusual political and social movement, the National Alliance, whose aim was to create openings for communication and co-operation between the members of the political parties and prominent figures in Bulgaria's economic life, academics, and representatives of the Military League and IMRO³⁷. Members of the National Alliance included Liapchev and Mollov from the Democratic Party, Atanas Burov from the National Progressive Party, Smilov from the National Liberal Party, and General Lazarov, a leading cadre of the Military League³⁸.

By 1922 the time was ripe for a purely political alliance of all the parties. A new political grouping was created, the Constitutional Bloc, which consisted of the Democrats, the National Progressives, and the Radicals. One of the Bloc's leading lights was Alexander Tsankov³⁹. Directly after it had come

34. FO 421/299, Confidential report No 299, Herbert Dering to Earl Curzon, Sofia, 28 Sept. 1920.

35. AYE/KY, A/1920, A/5/XII/(4), Greek Legation in Bulgaria to Foreign Ministry, Sofia, 29 Oct. - 11 Nov. 1920, No 2006.

36. AYE/KY, A/1920, A/5/XII/(4), Greek Legation in Bulgaria to Foreign Ministry, Information, 5 September 1920, Sofia 7/20 Sept. 1920, No 471. FO 371/5812, Memorandum from Baird enclosed in Baird to Arthur Peel, Constantinople, 16 July 1921, ff. 52-3.

37. Dellin, *op. cit.*, 106. Crampton, *op. cit.*, 96. *Istoriia*, 88.

38. V. Georgiev, *Narodniat Cgovor 1921-1923* [People's Alliance 1921-1923], Sofia 1989, p. 108.

39. FO 421/319, Enclosure in confidential report No 40, S. D. Water to Arthur Henderson, Sofia, 26 August 1930. M. Kumanov, "Km istoriata na byrzoaznite i drevnbyrzoaznite polititseski partii v Kiystendiilski okrid (1918-1923)" [To the History of the Bourgeois and Petty Bourgeois Political Parties in the Kynstendil District (1918-1923)], *Vtressnata politika na Bulgaria prez kapitalizma (1878-1944)* [The Home Policy of Bulgaria during Capitalism (1878-1944)], Sofia 1980, pp. 144-5. *Istoriia*, 88.

into being, the Constitutional Bloc approached the National Alliance and the understanding reached by the two associations resulted in a broad coalition of all those who were opposed to the Bulgaro-Yugoslav rapprochement and the abandoning of Bulgaria's territorial "rights" in Macedonia. This coalition eventually succeeded in overthrowing the Stamboliiski government⁴⁰.

At the end of 1918, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation reconstituted itself and made Sofia its base. The founders of this new Committee were cadres of the old Macedonian Committees, IMRO, the Verhoven Komitet, and the successive Macedonian Committees of Sofia which were brought into action during the First World War, after the dissolution of IMRO⁴¹. The leading faction consisted of General Alexander Protogerov, Todor Alexandrov, an leading cadre in paramilitary organisations, and Petar Tsaulev, Chief of Ohrid Police⁴².

The main objective of the reconstituted IMRO—which, despite its name was controlled by Verhovist elements—was the incorporation of Macedonia into the Bulgarian state⁴³. But the country's lack of both military strength and international support made this an impossible aim. Once again, it seemed more realistic to pursue the goal of Macedonian autonomy, a solution which was supported both in IMRO proclamations from the beginning of the twentieth century and by the precedent of Eastern Rumelia. The idea of autonomy was regarded as the only viable solution for the salvation of the Bulgarian population of Greek and Yugoslav Macedonia⁴⁴.

The way IMRO saw it was that if these aims were to be realised it was necessary first to arouse the interest of the Great Powers and of international public opinion. And to do this it was essential to create the impression that the indigenous population of Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia was neither Yugoslav nor Greek but a distinct entity in its own right and strongly opposed to the decisions made by the central authorities. It was also vital to incite the

40. AMAE, Europe 1918-1940, Bulgarie, vol. 29, M. Clement-Cimon to Raymond Poincaré, Belgrade, 20 June 1923, ff. 210-11. Dellin, *op. cit.*, 106.

41. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/II/(1), Mazarakis, Head of the Greek Military Mission in Bulgaria, to Foreign Ministry, Sofia, 23 Dec. 1918, No 28. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/II/(1), Coded telegram from Diomidis to Politis, Athens, 23 Jan. 1919, No 260.

42. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 16. Barker, *op. cit.*, 39.

43. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/II/(3), Foreign Ministry to Politis, Athens, 10 April 1919, No 2956.

44. FO 421/297, Confidential report No 26, Harry Lamb to Earl Curzon, Sofia, 7 Apr. 1919.

refugees in Bulgaria to agitate to be allowed to return to their homes in Macedonia⁴⁵.

To achieve the first aim, armed forces were dispatched to make it appear as though a revolutionary situation were afoot, as had already been done in the first decade of the twentieth century⁴⁶, and the electorate in Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia was primed to perform as the Organisation wished. The tactics were successful in Yugoslav Macedonia. Numerous bands combed the region south of Skopje, and in Yugoslavia's first post-war parliamentary elections the indigenous population, incited—and intimidated—by Alexandrov, voted overwhelmingly for the YCP and clearly dissociated itself from the rest of the electoral body⁴⁷.

In Greece, however, things did not run so smoothly for IMRO, for it no longer had such strong support there. The Bulgarian population had begun leaving for Bulgaria immediately after the Balkan Wars and the flow had increased to a flood after 1919. In fact, had the protocol for a Greek-Bulgarian exchange of populations been implemented (as laid down by the Treaty of Neuilly), IMRO activity on Greek territory would have been impossible, which was one reason why IMRO fiercely opposed it⁴⁸.

IMRO achieved its second objective—to prince and activate the refugees from Greek and Yugoslav Macedonia—rather more easily by assuming the tutelage of the refugee organisations. The Executive Committee was the supreme administrative organ of the Macedonian refugee organisations in Bulgaria. There were about fifty of these organisations in the country; they dated from the end of the Balkan Wars and each one was named after its members' home town or village⁴⁹. It was the Executive Committee, with Ivan Karadjulov as its President and the newspaper *Narodnost* as its organ, which directed the refugee organisations and raised money for the liberation of

45. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/II/(2), Telegram from Kanellopoulos to Politis, Constantinople, 19 July 1919, No 4905.

46. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/II/(5), Mazarakis to General Staff, Sofia, 8 Mar. 1919, No 117 confidential. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/III/(2), Iatridis to General Staff Thessaloniki, Sofia, 23 Sept. 1919, No 717. AYE/KY, A/1921, A/5/XII/(16), Greek Legation in Prague to Foreign Ministry, Prague, 13/26 Dec. 1920, No 946. Barker, *op. cit.*, 37-8.

47. Barker, *op. cit.*, 23-4. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 24-5, 55.

48. C. A. Macartney, *National States and National Minorities*, London 1934, p. 439.

49. AYE/KY, A/1920, A/5/XII/(5), Military Mission in Bulgaria to War Office, Sofia, 6 May 1920, No 402 confidential. N. Chingo, "The Macedonians in Bulgaria after the Fall of the Fascist Regime", *Macedonian Review*, 7 (1977), 274.

Macedonia⁵⁰. The Committee in fact sought Macedonia's incorporation into Bulgaria, and had sent a memorandum to this effect to the Peace Conference⁵¹. But the difficulty of achieving this goal, allied with IMRO's increasing influence on the Executive Committee, led the latter initially to propose Macedonian autonomy as a preferable alternative to annexation by Bulgaria⁵² and, after 1919, to abandon all hope of annexation and accept Macedonian autonomy as the only possible solution.

In fact, the Executive Committee was a screen for IMRO, which the latter used to keep the refugees together, control their movements and conduct, and provide the necessary capital and human resources to fuel its activity on Yugoslav and Greek territory; and the Committee also served as one more forum to promote IMRO policy both within Bulgaria and abroad. IMRO's catalytic presence in Bulgaria in the inter-war period and its influence on Bulgarian policy towards neighbouring countries was due precisely to the control of the refugee masses which the Executive Committee gave it⁵³.

Apart from the Executive Committee, there were also the Women's Union, the Students' Union, the Union of Macedonian Youth and an organisation called "*Ilinden*"⁵⁴. The last was founded in 1921 by Alexandrov and the Military League for the purpose of providing material aid to the veterans of 1903 who had settled in Bulgaria and of supporting the struggle for the "liberation" of Macedonia. It had its own organ, the newspaper *Ilinden*, espoused a "conservative" ideology, and, like the other organisations, worked alongside the Executive Committee, reinforcing the refugee front and strengthening IMRO's position within Bulgaria⁵⁵.

At the end of 1918, concurrently with the foundation of the Verhovist IMRO, there appeared another Macedonian Committee, the Provisional

50. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/V/(7), Mazarakis, Head of Mission to General Staff, Sofia, 17/30 Mar. 1919, No 141. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/V/(5), Greek Military Mission in Bulgaria, Information bulletin, 6 Dec. 1919.

51. FO 421/297, Confidential report No 26, Harry Lamb to Earl Curzon, Sofia, 7 April 1919. Vlahov, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 233.

52. FO 421/297, Confidential report No 26, Harry Lamb to Earl Curzon, Sofia, 7 Apr. 1919.

53. FO 421/297, Confidential report No 26, Harry Lamb to Lord Curzon, Sofia, 7 Apr. 1919. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 10, 19-20.

54. C. Miceva, "Les Emigres bulgares de la Macédoine et la scission de l'Organisation révolutionnaire intérieure macédonienne en 1928", *Etudes historiques*, 13 (1985), 195.

55. AYE/KY, A/1921, A/5/XII/(7), Greek Legation in Bulgaria to Foreign Ministry, Sofia, 7/20 Sept. 1921, No 5192 confidential. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 37-8.

Representation of the old IMRO. This committee consisted of former supporters of the Sandanski tendency, such as Gortse Petrov, Pavel Hristov, Todor Panitsa, and Dimo Hadjidimov, and sought the unification of Macedonia and its complete independence from its neighbours. The new Macedonian state structure would adopt the Swiss administrative system and grant political and cultural autonomy to all the nationalities living within it⁵⁶. Early in 1919, the Provisional Representation became more active than IMRO, organising meetings and circulating a newspaper and numerous pamphlets arguing the case for autonomy. Needless to say, the Provisional Representation, led by well-known and active komitadjis, went down much better with the Macedonian refugees than the Verhovist IMRO⁵⁷. Indeed, it sent a memorandum to the Paris Peace Conference demanding autonomy for Macedonia, not only on behalf of the refugees in Bulgaria, but, as it claimed, expressing "the desire of all the peoples living in Macedonia to preserve it as an integral and self-existent entity in the Balkans"⁵⁸. It also denounced Alexandrov and Protogerov (who were asking to be accepted as representatives of the inhabitants of Macedonia) at the Conference as "a disgrace to Bulgarian statehood"⁵⁹.

The decisions reached at the Peace Conference disappointed the members of the Provisional Representation and made its future uncertain. In early June 1919, realising the futility of pursuing Macedonian autonomy in the context of the situation established by the Treaty of Neuilly, the organisation finally turned to the solution of an autonomous Macedonia within Yugoslav borders. With this aim in mind, members of the Provisional Representation had meetings with junior cadres at the Yugoslav Embassy in Sofia; but without result⁶⁰. The Provisional Representation broke up in

56. FO 421/297, Enclosure No 1 in confidential report No 51, Harry Lamb to Earl Curzon, Sofia, 27 May 1919. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/V/(5), Military Mission in Bulgaria to General Staff, Sofia, 23 Sept. 1919, No 573 confidential. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/II/(3), Foreign Ministry to Politis, Athens, 10 Apr. 1919, No 2956. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 39. Vlahov, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 230.

57. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/II/(5), Mazarakis to President of Government, Sofia, 22 Feb. 1919, No 107 confidential. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/II/(3), Foreign Ministry to Politis, Athens, 10 Apr. 1919, No 2956. Vlahov, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 234.

58. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/V/(1), newspaper *Biuletin* [Bulletin], 2/15 May 1919.

59. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/II/(3), Warning to the inhabitants of Macedonia and the Macedonian immigrants in Bulgaria, enclosure in Foreign Ministry document to Politis, Athens, 10 Apr. 1919, No 2956.

60. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 40.

October 1919, when Gortse Petrov and Dimo Hadjidimov clashed over its future. After the collapse, Petrov joined BANU and Hadjidimov the BCP⁶¹. But most of the organisation's cadres, members, and sympathisers turned to the refugee organisations under the Executive Committee and continued their activities there.

Their difference of opinion with the main tendency of the Executive Committee led the former members of the Provisional Representation to break away in October 1920. The new organisation which they formed, the Provisional Committee, envisaged an autonomous Macedonia within a Yugoslav federation, and, in furtherance of this federalist aim, it approached and began to work with similar Turkish, Koutsovlach, and Albanian organisations, though its activities were directed chiefly towards Europe⁶². All this disturbed IMRO, which attempted to make up its differences with the Provisional Committee and induce its members to return to the Executive Committee's fold. The protracted negotiations got nowhere, however. The Provisional Committee's attitude infuriated IMRO, which, in 1923, launched a pogrom against Provisional Committee cadres and ordinary members⁶³. Those who survived sought refuge in Vienna, where, a year later, they helped to found Dimitar Vlahov's IMRO (United). However, the federalist tendency in Bulgaria was more or less annihilated. In subsequent years, the few remaining federalists joined IMRO (United) and once again endured the vengeful wrath of IMRO.

In the period under examination, a decisive role in both Bulgaria's domestic affairs and the "Macedonian Question" was played by the Military League, which was founded in 1919⁶⁴. Its membership consisted of officers on active service and also those who had been forced to retire by the Treaty of Neuilly's restrictions on the Bulgarian armed forces. Many of them were originally from Macedonia. The members of the Military League regarded the Treaty of Neuilly as a humiliation for Bulgaria and the founding of their League as an act of resistance to it.

The Military League initially took a guarded view of BANU's rise to

61. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 41. Vlahov, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 234. J. Swire, *Bulgarian Conspiracy*, London 1939, p. 145.

62. Barker, *op. cit.*, 39-40. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 32-3.

63. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 34-5. Swire, *op. cit.*, 34-5.

64. AYE/KY, A/1919, A/5/V/(5), Greek Military Mission in Bulgaria. Information bulletin, 8 Nov. 1919. Whetstone, *op. cit.*, 83.

power. But it found Stamboliiski's efforts to reach an agreement with Yugoslavia and the final interment of the dream of the Great Bulgaria unacceptable, and its aim thenceforth became to oust Stamboliiski and replace him with a dictatorship run by its own members, or at least by politicians who shared the League's ideas⁶⁵. But the Bulgarian people's enthusiastic response to BANU made it difficult to overthrow Stamboliiski. The League therefore launched itself into a quest for allies, whom it found amongst the Democrats and the members of IMRO⁶⁶. The latter's activities in Yugoslav Macedonia placed a tremendous obstacle in the way of the Bulgaro-Yugoslav talks. The Military League donated the huge sum of two million leva to IMRO to help it escalate its activities, and also promised that the army would abstain from any action against IMRO in Pirin⁶⁷.

The League tried to overthrow Stamboliiski three times. On the first two occasions (in December 1920 and January 1923), the plot was discovered before the *coup* could take place⁶⁸. But Stamboliiski's tepid reaction to the aspiring junta and the announcement of the Nish agreements spurred the Military League to act with IMRO and the bourgeois parties to topple Stamboliiski before the agreements could be ratified by BANU's parliamentary majority⁶⁹. The *coup* took place successfully in June 1923, conducted chiefly by members of the Military League, with IMRO forces standing by ready to intervene if necessary⁷⁰. Stamboliiski and a number of BANU cadres were assassinated, and many other cadres and supporters were forced to flee the country. The Tsankov government, which came to power with the junta's support, was subsequently to bury the Bulgaro-Yugoslav rapprochement. It openly supported IMRO and practised a revanchist policy towards Yugoslavia in particular and also towards Greece, based, of course, on Italian support.

65. FO 421/299, Confidential report No 84, Herbert Dering to Earl Curzon, Sofia, 28 Sept. 1920. AYE/KY, A/1920, A/5/XII/(5), Military Mission in Bulgaria to General Staff. Information bulletin, 24 Mar. - 21 Apr. 1920, Sofia, 22 Apr. 1920, No 336 confidential.

66. AYE/KY, A/1920, A/5/XII/(4), Greek Legation in Bulgaria to Foreign Ministry, Information, 5 Sept. 1920, Sofia, 7/20 Sept. 1920, No 471. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 51.

67. AYE/KY, B/1920, B/59/(1α), Foreign Ministry, Code Office. Excerpt from information bulletin, 26 Feb. - 23 Mar. 1920. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 51.

68. AYE/KY, A/1920-1921, A/5/(25), Greek Legation in Bulgaria, Sofia, 22 Dec. 1920, No 2659. Whetstine, *op. cit.*, 86.

69. FO 421/304, Confidential report No 94, William Erskine to Earl Curzon, Sofia, 14 June 1923, Troebst, *op. cit.*, 31.

70. FO 421/304, Confidential report No 99, William Erskine to Earl Curzon, Sofia, 20 June 1923. AMAE Europe 1918-1940, Bulgarie, vol. 29, Georges Picot to Raymond Poincaré, Sofia, 30 June 1923, ff. 269-70.

The royal family had also come out against the Bulgaro-Yugoslav rapprochement and in favour of reviving the "Macedonian Question" by fanning the flames of irredentism. King Boris was hostile to any union between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, believing that the royal families of both countries would have no place in the new state structure. At best, the role of king would devolve upon Alexander of Yugoslavia, since Yugoslavia had been on the winning side at the end of the First World War and was clearly stronger than Bulgaria in every respect⁷¹. Boris was not powerful enough to bring down the BANU government nor to force Stamboliiski to revise his foreign policy. The Bulgarian people had not yet forgotten the painful experiences of the First World War, which had been largely due to the choices made by his predecessor Ferdinand. Furthermore, he had little support in the political world. He therefore elected to act as mediator to bring together all the forces which had the ~~desire~~ and the power to overthrow Stamboliiski. Specifically, when the representatives of the Military League and the bourgeois parties approached Boris a few months before the *coup d'état* and asked for his help, he refused to play an active part; but he did advise them to study and emulate the methods employed by Kemal Atatürk to prepare and carry out the putsch in Turkey⁷². Also, the rapprochement between IMRO and the Military League was due in large part to the personal friendship between Boris and Protogerov⁷³.

It was not Boris who conceived the idea of toppling Stamboliiski, nor did he play an active part in the bloody *coup*. But the royal endorsement of the seditious plans and the National Alliance together formed the cohesive bond between those forces which, loyal to the dream of the Great Bulgaria, were contemplating the overthrow of BANU and its replacement with a government whose goal would be the unification of Macedonia with the kingdom of Bulgaria.

From all that has been said above, it is clear that the "Macedonian Question" was one of the most important issues which preoccupied the political world and public opinion in Bulgaria. As far as foreign policy was concerned, the "Macedonian Question" was a source of friction with neighbouring

71. FO 421/318, Confidential report No 65, Neville Henderson to A. Henderson, Belgrade, 26 Mar. 1930. Barker, *op. cit.*, 22, 38-9.

72. AMAE Europe 1918-1940, Bulgarie, vol. 29, Georges Picot to Raymond Poincaré, Sofia, 16 June 1923, f. 163.

73. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 51.

countries. And within Bulgaria itself, no-one could ignore the tens of thousands of Macedonian refugees, whose vote did much to determine election results—as was also the case in neighbouring Greece. All the parties therefore adopted clear, though not always unwavering, positions on the “Macedonian Question”. The single common denominator in all these policies was the desire to reverse the territorial *status quo* imposed by the Treaty of Neuilly. The only party which tried to take a different line, the BWSDP, saw its strength dwindle to such an extent that it was forced to throw in its lot with the Tsankov regime in order not to disappear altogether.

The policies adopted by the other parties may be summed up as follows. On the one hand, there were the right and centre-right parties, which sought the direct or indirect incorporation of Macedonian territory into Bulgaria; and on the other, the parties at the left-wing end of the political spectrum, which were trying to go beyond the doctrines of Bulgarian foreign policy. Their efforts were, if not applauded, then at least tolerated by the electorate; but they jeopardised the interests—and sometimes the very existence—of important factors in Bulgarian society, such as the royal family, the Macedonian Committees, the refugee organisations, and the armed forces. The *Sobranje*’s imminent ratification of the Bulgaro-Yugoslav rapprochement, on the initiative of the parliamentary omnipotent Stamboliiski, made it imperative that the opposing forces unite to remove him forcibly from power. All the same, in subsequent years, the change of political scenery contributed very little to the success of the plans for a Great Bulgaria.