The Birth of ‘Macedonianism’ in the Interwar Period

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1. The role of the Communist International in the hatching of the ‘Macedonian nation’.

In historiography the view that the ‘Macedonian nation’ was a creation of Tito is widespread. This position can of course not be denied, since the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) had particular reasons for promoting ‘Macedonianism’ in Yugoslav Macedonia as a counterweight ideology to Bulgarian-Serbian competition in the interwar period. The need to detach the Slavs of Macedonia from Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian influence with the creation of a collective Slav-Macedonian identity had already been underscored in the early 20th century by a number of Slav intellectuals, such as Krste Misirkov, Stefan Dedov, Diamandi Mišajkov and Dimitrija Čupovski. Foreseeing that the antagonism between Serbs and Bulgarians was continuing at the expense of the local population and that it only perpetuated Turkish rule, they sought to have the Slavs of Macedonia acknowledged as a separate community (millet). Even so, the political conditions of the early 20th century did not favour the advocacy of Slav-Macedonianism as a new collective ethnic identity, and its early proponents had very little impact on the masses. The political and ideological origins of ‘Macedonianism’ were essentially posed by the Third Communist International (the Comintern) in the interwar period. It is documented that the Communist International saw the Macedonian question as a tactical issue, relating to the political conditions of the time.¹ The publication of important documents for the period 1923-1925 from the Comintern archive has essentially confirmed the view that there were specific reasons as to why the Communist International was promoting a United and Independent Macedonia within a Balkan Soviet Republic. These were to assist IMRO in its attempt to create a unified front between the Bulgarian Communists, the Bulgarian Farmers and Bulgarian-Macedonian organisations for the advance of the revolution in Bulgaria, the establishment of a government of workers and farmers and the destabilisation of the Balkan states.² According to the Communist International, the Macedonian organisations in Bulgaria should not only disassociate themselves from the influence of Bulgarian ‘bourgeois’ political elements, but also estrange themselves from Bulgarian nationalism. Criticising the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) for the neutral stand it took during the coup against the agrarian government of Aleksandar Stambolijski, Karl Radek expressed himself in the following way at the plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (12-13 June 1923) in Moscow:

‘The Macedonian Question has played an important role throughout the whole of Bulgaria’s modern history. Macedonia, in which there reside peasants of whom it is difficult to say if they are Serbs or Bulgarian, is an old object of discord between Bulgaria and Serbia. After Bulgaria’s defeat in the war, the Agrarian party of Stambolijski gave up [contesting] Macedonia. It gave up not only formally, and in Nis it signed a treaty with Yugoslavia on the basis of which Stambolijski would persecute the old Macedonian organisations. From a social perspective, these are organisations of small and poor peasants. They have a revolutionary past, they have struggled against the rule of the Turkish landowners, against the Serbian bourgeoisie, they have illegal revolutionary organisations. There has been
sympathy for the Russian Revolution for a while now. The Macedonian organisations were a social factor with which we could have connected... The Party has done nothing and its neglect of the Macedonian Question is typical. Instead of the term ‘Bulgarian people’, as this was used in previous declarations of the Third International, the terms ‘Macedonian people’ and ‘Macedonian population without national distinctions’ were introduced in 1923–24. The aim of the Communist International was that all nationalities in Macedonian would develop an indigenous Macedonian consciousness as one ‘people’ from a political perspective, and aspire to a United and Independent Macedonia so as to undermine the ‘bourgeois’ Balkan states.

The new line imposed at the 6th Conference of the Balkan Communist Federation (Moscow, December 1923) and the fifth Congress of the Communist International (17/6 – 8/7/1924) was for a ‘United and Independent Macedonia within a Balkan Federation’, which would be achievable ‘only if the struggle of the Macedonian people is aligned with the struggle of the workers and peasants of the Balkans’. It is obvious that such a policy aimed at the undermining of the Balkan states, including Bulgaria. In a letter to IMRO in July 1924, the Communist International set as a precondition for its assistance the obligation of the organisation to begin the revolution in Bulgaria, with the aim of expelling the Bulgarian state organs from the Bulgarian section of Macedonia, and its proclamation as an independent state. The pressure exercised by the Communist International on the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) in 1924 to accept the decision of the fifth Congress of the Communist International on the Macedonian Question can be explained by its policy toward IMRO. The wing of the KKE that accepted the new line justified its position with the argument that, to the degree that support for a ‘United and Independent Macedonia’ contributed to the successful outcome of the revolution in Bulgaria and the Balkans, then the KKE, as an internationalist party, was obliged to accept it, even coming into conflict with the Greek bourgeoisie.

The term ‘Macedonian nation’, identified exclusively and emphatically with the Slav element of Macedonia, had not yet appeared in the texts of the Communist International, but the Macedonian Question was no longer considered simply a Bulgarian issue. The plan of the Communist International failed, but Soviet involvement in the Macedonian Question resulted in the political and ideological polarisation of the Bulgarian-Macedonian initiative. As an ideological and political counterweight to the IMRO of Ivan Mihajlov, an IMRO (United) was founded in Vienna in October 1925, under the mantle of the Communist International. On the Central Committee of IMRO (United) there was a communist wing and a national-revolutionary wing, which, although it disagreed with the communist orientation of the organisation, was counting on the assistance of the Soviet Union for a review of the peace treaty. In 1928, with the decisions of the sixth Congress of the Communist International, the national-revolutionary wing of the Central Committee of IMRO (United) was eliminated, and the organisation now acquired a narrowly communist character, with Dimităr Vlahov and Vladimir Pop-tomov, members of the Bulgarian Communist Party, in a leading role. The influence of the IMRO (United) in the Balkans was insignificant, given that it was first based in Vienna and later in Berlin and that its newspaper, the Makedonsko Delo (Macedonian Question) published in Bulgarian, was not easily accessible in the Balkans. Until 1928, small groups of the IMRO (United) had been formed only in the Serbian section of Macedonia. They were of little political significance and were expunged completely by the Serbian authorities in 1929. The first nucleuses of the organisation were formed in Bulgaria in 1928. Yet, due to its narrow communist character and the enmity of Mihajlov’s IMRO, IMRO (United) could not evolve into a significant political factor in Bulgaria, and was limited to a propaganda role amongst the Bulgarian-Macedonian refugees. The
basic political line of the organisation was a ‘United and Independent Macedonia’ within a Balkan Federation, and by Macedonian people they meant all the ethnicities of Macedonia (Bulgarians, Albanians, Turks, Jews, Vlachs, Greeks, Gypsies). In a memorandum (10/9/1927) on the condition of the oppressed peoples of the Balkans to the President of the Council for National Minorities in Geneva, they noted characteristically:

‘In Serbian Macedonia all Belgrade governments, regardless of their differences in domestic and foreign policy, apply the same policy as regards the Macedonians. The Macedonian people, that is all the nationalities that live there and in whose name we speak - Bulgarians, Albanians, Turks, Jews, Greeks, Gypsies – are denied political and civil rights. All Serbian authorities have treated them and continue to treat them as though they are Serbs...
If we were to examine how the Macedonian people lives from Greek work, we would see that here the situation is the same. The Greek authorities expelled the Turks from Macedonia, after having first plundered them. They impose many impediments on the Jews, so as to force them to move elsewhere. They expel the Bulgarians as well... There is no difference between the Greek and the Serb governments as regards the nationalities in Macedonia. Greece treats these nationalities as though they were slaves... If we examine the Bulgarian section of Macedonia, we would see that the situation here is similar to that in the Serbian and Greek sections. The Greek and Turk Macedonians who lived here before were expelled. The population that lives in this section of Macedonia, indeed of Bulgarian nationality, enjoys cultural rights. It has schools, churches, etc. And this is the only difference between the condition of the Macedonians in Bulgaria and those in Greece and Serbia... From every other perspective, the condition of the Macedonians in this section of Macedonia does not differ from that of those under Greek and Serbian rule, and in some cases is even worse. The political regime in the Macedonia under Bulgarian rule is one of the most tyrannical in the world... As for the economic situation to which the Bulgarian Macedonians have been abandoned to live in, this is especially tragic.’

Which factors were influential in the abandonment of this position and the adoption of the view that there existed a ‘Macedonian nation’, exclusively identified with the Slavic group? The access to the Comintern Archive that we enjoy today allows us to follow this process much more completely.

The old view is generally confirmed, that with Hitler’s rise to power the Comintern wished to avoid exploitation of the Macedonian Question by Nazi Germany in favour of Bulgaria in the upcoming war, as had happened during the First World War. In 1933 Mihajlov’s IMRO had accepted the IMRO (United) position for a Unified and Independent Macedonia, as a second Bulgarian state, considering the national identity of Bulgarian compatible with the political name of Macedonian. The need for a not only ideological and political campaign, but also a national one against Mihajlov’s IMRO, was thus now clear. The efforts of the Comintern to prevent the exploitation of Yugoslavia’s ethnic problems, especially the Croatian, by Nazi Germany had a significant effect. The issue of the foundation of a national Croat and Slovenian Party was thus quickly posed, so that the now nationally-based Communist Parties would henceforth deal with the country’s ethnic problems. Given the new conditions, Yugoslavia should act as a bulwark to Nazi Germany’s efforts to penetrate the Balkans.

As soon as Vladimir Poptomov, a member of the Central Committee of the IMRO (United), was informed that the situation of the organisation and the prospect of ‘revolu-
tionary action’ were to be discussed within the Comintern, he submitted a memorandum on 15/11/1933 to the Secretariat of the Balkan States (Balkanländer Sekretariat, henceforth BLS), the Comintern organ responsible for the Balkans. He attributed the causes for the failure of IMRO (United) to develop into a mass organisation to its centralised character, the problems in distributing the newspaper *Makedonsko Delo*, and the difficulties in reading and understanding the newspaper in Greece and Yugoslavia, since it was published in the scholarly Bulgarian language.\(^7\) Poptomov placed particular importance on the different socio-political conditions that prevailed in the three sections of the wider area of Macedonia, the continuous Serbisation and Hellenisation of the Slavic population, with the result that the younger generations could only easily read and speak the Greek or Serbian languages. As such, according to Poptomov, the newspaper *Makedonsko Delo* could only be understood by the Bulgarian-Macedonian refugees in Bulgaria. He proposed the decentralisation of the organisation, that a national-revolutionary organisation be founded in every section of Macedonia under the guidance of the Communist Parties and with the slogan ‘self-determination of the Macedonian people until the secession of a sovereign and unified Macedonia.’\(^8\) Perhaps the main point of Poptomov’s essay was the danger of Serbisation and Hellenisation succeeding.

At the meeting of the Office of the BLS on 20 December 1933, the proposal of Rilski - pseudonym of Georgi Karadžov, a member of the Bulgarian IMRO (United) - for the IMRO (United) was examined;\(^9\) his position on the right of the ‘Macedonian people’ to secede, for a Unified and Independent Macedonia, for a Balkan federation of workers, was ratified.\(^10\) The question of the ethnicity of the Macedonians was also posed, and ‘a special examination of the question was deemed necessary, if possible with the participation of the comrades who have arrived from Macedonia.’\(^11\) Vlahov was also in attendance at the meeting of 22 December 1933. The issue of the drafting of a decision for IMRO (United) was posed, with the ethnicity of the Macedonians at its core. This task was assigned to Vlahov, Rilski and German, pseudonym of the Bulgarian communist Pavle Gičev, who were given three days in which to present the draft decision.\(^12\) The basic points of the decision were as follows:

‘The national question of Macedonia is particularly closely tied to the question of the war and the question of international social revolution. The rare peculiarity of historical evolution created here, from an ethnic perspective, a situation of which there is no comparison anywhere else in Europe… After the Balkan and the imperialist wars, Macedonia was divided between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. There followed an artificial movement of populations from whole regions, settlements, violent de-nationalisation and assimilation… The Macedonian people see the danger in which they will be as long as capitalism and imperialism exist, as long as the large imperialist centres continue to exploit the small Balkan states… The country’s population, which has passed through so many wars, has realised that the new imperial war could lead to its complete physical annihilation, if war is not prevented by a prior uprising and the victory of the social revolution in Europe. This situation has rallied all the working population of this section of the Balkan peninsula into one totality, and has created a peculiar situation here, that the population that speaks Slavic and the population that speaks the languages of the minorities feel the same national oppression, economic exploitation and pillaging. They have common interests at the present moment and feel the necessity for a common defence, for when the future historical events arrive…

*The working masses of Macedonia do not characterise themselves and they do not want to be either Bulgarians or Serbs, they consider the governments of the Greeks and the Turks as foreign powers. They characterise them-

\(^7\) Poptomov 1939b: 132-133

\(^8\) Poptomov 1939b: 186

\(^9\) Rilski 1934a: 11

\(^10\) Rilski 1934a: 11

\(^11\) Rilski 1934b: 11

\(^12\) Rilski 1934c: 11
selves as the predominant Macedonian whole... This is where the idea of national Macedonian rule is found, the right of the full national self-determination of the Macedonians, the idea of a unified and independent Macedonian workers democracy, in a common struggle against imperialism and for social revolution.\textsuperscript{13}

The main section of the draft plan referred to the upcoming war, using the terms ‘Macedonian people’ and ‘working masses of Macedonia’, indicating all the nationalities of Macedonia, Slav and non-Slav, as a unified total coming under the term ‘people’. This specificity legitimated the right to a unified and independent Macedonian state ‘of the working masses’. In essence, this draft plan did not differ from previous IMRO (United) declarations, with the simple difference that, for tactical purposes, mention was no longer made of Soviet democracies or Balkan federations. The draft plan was not deemed satisfactory and, at the meeting of the BLS on 28 December 1933, which Vlahov did not attend, German (pseudonym of Gičev) was given until 31 December 1933 to submit the text of a final decision to the Office of the BLS.\textsuperscript{14}

Yet, the text submitted to the BLS on 31 December 1933 was similar to the previous draft plan:

‘After the Balkan and imperial wars - the result of which was that the unified from a geographical and economic perspective area of Macedonia was divided into three parts between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria – the economic and political condition of the Macedonian population has worsened even further... As a result of this policy, the old ethnographic physiognomy of some sections of Macedonia almost changed radically – in the Greek section of Macedonia - and to the degree that the local populations that remained there are prohibited, with the threat of capital punishment, of speaking their mother tongue (in the Macedonia under Serbian or Greek rule)... The overwhelming majority of the working population of Macedonia, which lives in Macedonia or as a refugee elsewhere, despite the differences existing in religion and language and the discord that has been artificially created over the centuries, constitutes a whole, with common economic and political interests at the present moment and feels the need for a common defence, for when the great future historic events arrive... Having as a basis the realisation of the need to preserve the common economic and political unity of Macedonia in the interest of its physical existence, [the population] demands the right to national self-determination and even the secession of an independent Macedonian state. The Macedonian masses do not want to belong neither to Bulgaria nor to Serbia nor to Greece, despite the fact that, from the point of view of language and religion, different sections of the Macedonian population are more closely related to the population of one or another Balkan state... Bearing all this in mind, the Balkan proletariat must support the national liberation struggle of the Macedonian people for national liberation and unity in every way, teaching it always consistently and surely that only the total defeat of imperialism will free the Macedonian people from the danger of total physical annihilation, a threat which it always finds it itself under given its geographical position.\textsuperscript{15}

The Balkan Communists had not grasped the essence of the problem. This was, of course, the matter of the identity of the Slavs of Macedonia, whom revisionist Bulgaria considered as unredeemed Bulgarians, something that would lead to Bulgaria joining the German camp in the upcoming war. The questioning of the Bulgarian identity of the
Slavs of Macedonia would deny Bulgaria the right to make claims. Already during the Balkan Conferences (1930 - 1933) Bulgaria had insisted on the signing of bilateral treaties for the protection of minorities. This should characterise the spirit of the decision. During the meeting of the BLS on 3 January 1934, then, German’s text was rejected and the intervention of leading Comintern cadres was necessary. The participation of Vasil Kolarov in amending the draft decision is acknowledged. The new text was presented at the meeting of the BLS on 7 January 1934, and was ratified by the Political Office of the Executive Committee of the Communist International at a closed meeting on 11 January 1934. According to the brief proceedings of the meeting, a discussion was held in which Vlahov, Kolarov, German and others participated. Unfortunately, the views that they presented have not been recorded. The Political Office accepted the text of the proposal as a basis, and commissioned the BLS ‘to compose a final text on the basis of the views exchanged and in agreement with comrade Kuusinen. The slogan ‘Workers Democracy’ should remain in the decision.’ The intervention of the higher cadres of the Comintern - including Otto Kuusinen, Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Communist International and member of the Finnish Communist Party - was, therefore, decisive for the final formulation of the decision on the Macedonian Question and the IMRO (United). The decision differed significantly from the draft decision of 31 December 1933.

‘In conditions of increased international and class conflicts, the direct danger of new wars and the maturing of the revolutionary crisis, the Macedonian national-revolutionary movement, the head of which is the IMRO (United), plays the role of an important element and ally of the working class, the peasantry and all the oppressed nationalities in the struggle to overturn the domination of the bourgeois class and the landowners in the three states that enslaved Macedonia.

‘The division of Macedonia, which was the foundation of the alliance between Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece in the war against Turkey and which immediately emerged as an issue that led to a new war between Serbia, Greece and others against Bulgaria, constitutes in the post-war period a permanent cause for the rise in conflict and the struggle between the three states for rule over the whole of Macedonia and access to the Aegean. On the other hand, the great imperialist states turned Macedonia into a bridgehead for political activities during the imperialist World War, and are now exploiting the Macedonian Question to strengthen their positions in the Balkans. Macedonia is thus one of the centres of the upcoming imperialist war.

‘The states that exist in Macedonia apply a pillaging economic policy that sucks the workers, waging terror and national oppression... The dominant nations of the three imperialist states that divided Macedonia justify national oppression by denying the national specificities of the Macedonian people, by denying the existence of a Macedonian nation. Greek chauvinism declares that the indigenous Slav population in the part of Macedonia that she rules over is constituted of Greeks who had been Slavised in the past centuries, who through violence must “return” to Greek culture, prohibiting them from speaking or learning their mother tongue. The great Serb chauvinists, invoking the existence of Serbian loanwords in the language of the local Macedonian population, declare that this population is one of the “tribes” of the unified Yugoslav nation and they Serbise it through violence. Finally, Bulgarian nationalism, exploiting the relationship of the Macedonian language with the Bulgarian, declares them to be Bulgarians and thus justifies the occupation of the region of Petritsi and its pillaging policy to-
ward the whole of Macedonia. By waging a struggle against the division and enslavement of the Macedonian people, against every kind of national, cultural, social and economic oppression, IMRO (United) must uncover the true meaning of all the sophisms that deny the Macedonians the character of a nation, and not allow them to spread throughout its environment. IMRO (United) must organise and wage a daily struggle against all types of national oppression, against every extraordinary law, for the right to the use of the mother tongue in all state and public institutions, for the freedom to have schools, publications, etc. in the mother tongue. In this struggle, the central slogan of IMRO (United) must be the slogan for the right of the nation to self-determination as far as secession and the achievement of a unified, Macedonian workers democracy.

The differentiation between the meanings ‘Macedonian people’ (i.e. all the ethnicities of Macedonia and with the political meaning of the term ‘people’) and ‘Macedonian nation’ as a national community with reference only to the Slavs is clear. Since the efforts of the Comintern to exploit the Macedonian Question to promote revolution had so far not brought the desired results, the appeal to the national idea was deemed more effective. Was, however, the decision a reflection of real conditions, or had the division of Macedonia created a feeling of unity amongst the Slavs, with a need to detach themselves from the Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian national ideas? As mentioned, the developments in the three sections were different. The Slav population used the term (Slav-) Macedonians as a geographical term, but also as an anodyne term that could neutralise the perhaps dangerous public self-characterisation of ‘Bulgarian’ in Yugoslavia and Greece, and which could express a localism with the meaning of ‘autochthon’ in contrast to the migrants, the Serb settlers or the Greek refugees. In terms of consciousness, the sense of difference from the Greek or Serb idea was expressed more in pro-Bulgarian terms, to the extent that we cannot talk about individuals with a fluid identity.

In the historiography of Skopje it is argued that the decision of the Communist International signified the first recognition of the ‘Macedonian nation’ as an objective reality in international arenas, something of great importance for subsequent developments. But, as arises from the proceedings of the meetings, the differing contents of the texts of the draft decision and the final decision indicate that the ‘Macedonian nation’ was not immediately considered a given reality. The Communist International did not mention the prime movers of Slav-Macedonian separatism, nor did it clarify the particular national characteristics of the ‘Macedonians’, which distinguished them from the Serbs, Greeks or Bulgarians. It is characteristic that in the draft and the decision for IMRO (United) even the Balkan Communists were unable to conceive the meaning of ‘nationality of the Macedonians’ as a specific ‘Slav-Macedonian nation’. There is no doubt that this was a political decision of the Comintern that was imposed on the Balkan Communist Parties. This decision questioned the right of the Bulgarians and of Mihajlov’s IMRO to contest the liberation of the ‘Macedonians’ as unredeemed Bulgarians. At the same time, it eliminated the differences between the Bulgarian and Yugoslav Communists over the ethnic identity of the ‘Macedonians’. The Balkan Communist Parties were now called upon to transform the geographical term ‘Macedonians’ into an ethnic term, with exclusive reference to Slavs. Within the new global conditions, after the rise of Nazism, a strong Yugoslavia had to constitute a barrier to Hitler’s expansion in the Balkans. Recognition of the national specificity of the ‘Macedonians’ and the questioning of Bulgarian and Serbian contestations, meant that the Macedonian Question could be resolved within the context of a new, federal Yugoslavia. It was not a coincidence then that, at the meeting of the BLS on 5 January 1934, it
was decided, alongside the decision on the existence of a ‘Macedonian nation’, to establish a Croatian and a Slovenian Communist Party within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.20

Yet, there is still the anthropological aspect. Independent of the political goals of the Communist International, what impact could the call for the existence of a ‘Macedonian nation’ have on the simple peasants of the wider Macedonian region? Was it ultimately an incumbent, alienated identity? As already mentioned, the term ‘Macedonian’ was used by the Slavs as a geographical, localised term, and the villagers called the Slavic idiom ‘Macedonian’. From this perspective, there was no name issue. The geographical term ‘Macedonian’ could take on a national dimension in the consciousness of the villages, if there was a political dynamic to promote this transformation, and if the political conditions required it, as indeed was the case during the Second World War. The fact should not be ignored that the Slav population in Serbian Macedonia was the victim of Serb-Bulgarian antagonism and of Greek-Bulgarian antagonism in Greek Macedonia. On the one hand, it was forced by IMRO to shelter the comitadjis, to declare itself Bulgarian and to maintain a Bulgarian position. Yet, on the other, it was persecuted by the Serbian military organisations, when it harboured IMRO, and was undergoing political Serbisation. It was natural that it would be experiencing a crisis of national identity.

For the Greeks, there was the saga of the Politis-Kalfov Protocol, the subsequent insistence of Bulgaria that the Greek government recognise a Bulgarian minority, and the general revisionist policy of Sofia made urgent the need for the Hellenisation of other language speakers in Greek Macedonia. Regardless of the long-term potential successes of Serbisation and Hellenisation, the alternative solution of the ‘Macedonian nation’ operated as a balance to traditional Serb-Bulgarian and Greek-Bulgarian antagonism and provided the population with a sense of security. Political elements could easily concoct a national ideology to service the needs of this ‘ethnogenesis’, with unclear dividing lines between myth and historical fact, so as to lend the Slavs of Macedonia a ‘glorious’ past.

The subsequent policy of the Comintern on the Macedonian issue was determined by the need to constitute a unified anti-fascist front along the spirit of the decisions of the Seventh and final Congress of the Communist International (25/7-20/8/1935). Immediately after the Congress, and in the aftermath of the assassination of the king of Yugoslavia Aleksander Karadjordjević, in October 1934 orders were given to the Balkan Communist Parties to gain the support of the ‘Macedonian masses’ for this front. The formation of a unified anti-fascist front along with the ‘bourgeois regimes’ made the continued existence of IMRO (United) as a separate political organisation unnecessary. The slogan of an ‘Independent Macedonia’ was abandoned in favour of campaigning for basic national, political and economic rights and freedoms.

The Seventh Congress of the Communist International provided the Balkan Communist Parties with the opportunity to shape their tactics in a manner that was to a great extent autonomous. Their position on the existence of a ‘Macedonian nation’, however, was a new factor, which they were obliged to take into account in their policies.
2. The Balkan communist parties in the light of the Comintern position on the existence of a ‘Macedonian nation’.

2.1. The Bulgarian Communist Party

The Bulgarian Communist Party considered the Macedonian Question to be at bottom a Bulgarian issue, and talked in terms of the divided sections of the Bulgarian people in Macedonia, Thrace and Dobruţa. The only difference between the Party and the official Bulgarian line on the autonomy of Macedonia was the position that the national issues of the Balkans, and, by extension, the Macedonian Question, would not be fully resolved within the existing capitalist system, but within a socialist society and a Soviet-style Balkan federation.

After the unsuccessful rebellion of September 1923, leading party cadres, among them Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov, fled abroad (Vienna, Berlin and finally Moscow), founding the External Bureau of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The majority of the Party Central Committee, however, remained in Bulgaria. Dimitrov and Kolarov gained high positions in the Comintern, meaning that they did not often express their positions, being still in tune with Bulgarian interests. Kolarov’s involvement in the processing of the decision of the Executive Committee of the Communist International on 11 January 1934 is a typical example. In Bulgaria (in contrast with Greece and Yugoslavia) there was an active IMRO (United) that functioned as an ideological and political counterpart to Mihajlov’s IMRO. The publication of the Comintern decision in the newspaper Makedonsko Delo in April 1934 provoked disarray and division within IMRO (United) in Bulgaria. Certain members of the ‘national-revolutionary’ wing denied the existence of a ‘Macedonian nation’. They believed that the break-up of Mihajlov’s IMRO in June 1934 and the political-military regime of 19 March 1934 had created a favourable climate for the further activity of the IMRO (United), which could turn against the party line. The result was that they were marginalised within the organisation, which was now fully controlled by the Bulgarian Communist Party. In February 1935, then, the Regional Committee of the IMRO (United) in Bulgarian Macedonia issued the following announcement to the ‘Brother Macedonians’, in complete harmony with the Comintern position.

‘The Greeks call us ‘Slavophone Greeks’ and the Serbs ‘correct Serbs’. Why? So as to justify their rule and their oppressive aspirations towards Macedonia. The Bulgarian chauvinists act in the same way. They exploit the relationship between the Macedonians and Bulgarians and characterise us as an ‘indivisible section of the Bulgarian nation’. The Bulgarian imperialists have always aspired to conquer and enslave Macedonia, not liberate it. Proof of this is our enslaved region. Is it for such freedom that now exists in the region of Petritsi that we struggled and continue to struggle? ... We must state it so that all hear, that we are not Serbs, nor Greeks, nor Bulgarians. We are Macedonians, a separate Macedonian nation. Only in this way can we best defend the independence of our movement and our right for an independent Macedonian state.’

This proclamation provoked the reaction of the Bulgarian authorities. On 15 August 1935, a wave of arrests of members of IMRO (United) ensued, both in Sofia and the region of Petritsi, essentially completely eliminating the organisation. The main charge related to the IMRO (United) position that the Macedonians were not Bulgarians, but a specific nation, as well as the organisation’s relations with the Communist Party.
With the 1935 arrests, the activities of IMRO (United) in Bulgaria were essentially paralysed. The arrested members were tried on 8 July 1936. They denied the category that IMRO (United) was a class-based organisation, an annex of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and claimed their relations with the Communists were tactical. All defined themselves as Bulgarians. The only one to characterise himself as a Macedonian was Asen Karakchev, claiming the right to self-determination of the region of Petritsi and even to its secession from Bulgaria. The court’s decision was issued on 21 July 1936. Dimitar Vlahov and Vladimir Poptomov were sentenced in their absence to 12 years and 6 months imprisonment. Others were sentenced to 5 years imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 lev, and others were found innocent. The trial, as well as general international developments, essentially marked the political death of IMRO (United) in Bulgaria. The initiative for propagandising in favour of the new positions on the Macedonian Question was now assumed by the BCP.

A succinct theoretical introduction to the ‘historical’ foundation of Slav-Macedonian identity was attempted from the columns of the newspaper Macedonian News, published in 1935-1936 by Angel Dinev for the Macedonian brotherhoods. Initially, it expressed the IMRO (United) line for a Unified and Independent Macedonian as an equal member of a Balkan Federation. In the spirit of the Comintern decision, Dinev attempted to distinguish between the specific term ‘Macedonian nation’ and the general term ‘Macedonian people’.

‘The Macedonian nation was created through a long historical process and formed fully even in the last century. Its anthropological composition is constituted through the admixture into a complete whole of the Ancient Macedonians and later Slavs in Macedonia... The Macedonian nation exists because its Slav-Macedonian population has a common language, the same customs, historical unity... unified Macedonian space and unified economy. There is also a Macedonian people, made up of the Slav-Macedonians and all the ethnicities in Macedonia. And it is not the first time that this question arises. Even in the 19th century, when our Macedonian renaissance began, the figures of the Macedonian Enlightenment, Theodosios of Skopje, the “Lozars”, those who fought for the dominance of the western dialect (the Macedonian) and others were bearers of a pure Macedonian consciousness and, just like the Bulgarian father Paisios, they taught our compatriots not to be ashamed to call themselves Macedonians. It is precisely these campaigners for an autocephalous Macedonian church and the creators of a self-existent Macedonian culture, those worthy successors of the first Macedonian teachers, the Saints Cyril and Methodius, who are the first people who showed us the existence of a specific Macedonian nationality. The Macedonian News is only following their sacred work, which was strangled by the foreign propaganda in Macedonia. We know of the damage done by this propaganda – in the past they divided the Macedonian population into Graekomans, Serbomans and Bulgarians to make the division and enslavement of the Macedonian homeland easier.

‘Regarding the question of the nationality of the Macedonians, we do not doubt that we shall meet resistance, and from many of our erstwhile friends... We do not deceive ourselves that it will be easy to stir the national consciousness of the Macedonians in Bulgaria, where their assimilation has progressed greatly. But we shall work without slacking in this direction, because we are committed Macedonians and know that only the Macedonian consciousness and sense of self will help to overcome in the best possible
way the wavering throughout the whole Macedonian movement on the road towards freedom and independence."27

This is an over-simplified, mechanistic application of the Stalinist model of the nation. The formation of a Slav-Macedonian identity is traced to the 19th century and its main pioneers are declared to be those who worked for the codification of a multi-dialect modern Bulgarian language, and who called themselves Bulgarians. But the difficulties implicated in the effort for ‘Macedonianisation’ in the inter-war period are not ignored. The newspaper could not begin a serious attempt at its mission, because the Bulgarian authorities soon ordered that it be closed down.

A ‘Macedonian Literary Circle’ was founded in 1938, at the instigation of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Its main members were Nikola Vapčarov, Anton Popov, Mihajl Smatrakalev, Kole Nedelkovski, Venko Markovski and Georgi Abadžiev. The purpose of the Circle, according to Vapčarov’s introduction, was the development of a ‘Macedonian’ literature through the study of linguistic idioms, folklore, customs, and the cultivation of a revolutionary romanticism about the past of the ‘Macedonian’ national-revolutionary movement (the Ilinden Uprising) as an element of an artistic realism.28 According to its statutes, the Circle remained clear of political activities, but it could express a political ideology. Its focus on Slav-Macedonianism, however, was more a flirtation. The language of the poetry was, as a rule, scholarly Bulgarian, and only Venko Markovski and Kole Nedelkovski made some attempt to write poems in the Slav-Macedonian idiom. Nedelkovski restored contacts with the widow and son of Misirkov, copying some of the publications of the father of Slav-Macedonian separatism, such as the work On Macedonian Matters, and sending them to his colleagues in Serbian Macedonia.29 In the spirit of the party line, the question or otherwise of a ‘Macedonian nation’ was seen as a political question. In 1939, Anton Popov wrote the following on the issue:

‘Is there a Macedonian nation? What are its features and which its characteristics? Where should we look for its beginning and its origin? It is to these questions that we have turned our attention the past few years. These are the objects of discord within various Macedonian circles. And, in keeping with the class and ideological camps of the rivals, different answers are given to these questions... In the last period, with the rise of imperialistic conflicts among the Balkan states, with the formation of the imperialist front in Macedonia as well, the propaganda spread among the Macedonian population and Macedonian refugees has been palpably strengthened. Macedonia has again become an object for division and distribution... Within such a context for Macedonia and the Macedonian Question, the acceptance or denial of the idea of the Macedonian nation is seen as a touchstone for Macedonia and its orientation, for the political road that it must take, for the reason that this question today can be posed only as the basis of the slogan for a free and independent Macedonia. The black agents of Bulgarian and Italian imperialism see these proclamations as Serbian work... They were never close to the Macedonian people, to the Macedonian masses, so as to be able to understand the changes that have taken place in the world view and orientation of the masses... They dream of a ‘Greater Bulgaria,’ ‘the union of the Bulgarian race,’ the ‘vital area’, etc. Yet, of a free Macedonia they do not want to hear or to think, and they want even less to hear of a Macedonian nation...’30

But in May 1941, immediately after the entry of the Bulgarian army into Serbian Macedonia, when it might have been expected that Slav-Macedonian feeling would
have increased, the Circle broke up and all attempts to awaken Slav-Macedonian sensibility were abandoned.\textsuperscript{31} Vapčarov and Popov were executed by the Germans in 1942 as Communists and for their resistance activity.

There was no fertile ground in Bulgaria for the cultivation of Slav-Macedonianism. In addition to the reaction of the Bulgarian state authorities, the stance of academic circles, who described the ‘Macedonian’ nation as an invention of the workshop of the Bulgarian Communist Party, was also negative. They would ironically comment that if only Dimităr Blagoev, founder of the Bulgarian Communist Party who came from Vasileiada, near Kastoria in Greek Macedonia, were alive, so that he could be informed as to his ethnicity!\textsuperscript{32} Even the BCP avoided clashing with the Bulgarian authorities, limiting itself more to theoretical pronouncements and adopting a flexible policy line.

\section*{2.2. The Communist Party of Greece}

The saga that the KKE had implicated itself in with its acceptance in 1924, following great pressure, of the decision of the fifth Congress of the Communist International, for a ‘Unified and Independent’ Macedonia, meant that in the future it was far more careful as regards the Macedonian Question. The main reason as to why the KKE, provoking internal division, adopted the decision of the fifth Congress at the Third Extraordinary Conference (December 1924) was to promote a collaboration with IMRO and the Bulgarian Communist Party, in the light of the upcoming rebellion in Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{33} This turned out to be revolutionary adventurism. Even if the line of a ‘Unified and Independent Macedonia’ theoretically held up, the KKE was not active on a political level. It is characteristic that after 1925 it was hesitant to found IMRO (United) groups in Greek Macedonia, drawing criticism from the Comintern. When Zachariades took over the Party leadership and visited Moscow in autumn 1931 with a Party delegation, he faced criticism for the KKE’s position on the Macedonian Question.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, after two meetings (the first at Thessaloniki in early 1932, attended not only by Slavophones but also by Jews, Muslims and Vlachs, and the second the same year at Veria, attended only by Slavophones), at which the member of the Political Office of the KKE Central Committee Stylianos Sklavinas was present, a founding meeting of IMRO (United) was called at Edessa in March 1933, electing a leadership core headed by Andreas Chipas, a member of the KKE from Ayios Panteleimonas.\textsuperscript{35}

In September 1934, the first statements of IMRO (United) groups began to be published in \textit{Rizospastis}, on the Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek identity of the Slav-Macedonians and the meaning of IMRO (United).\textsuperscript{36} The leading cadres of IMRO (United) were the Slav-Macedonians, members of the KKE, Andreas Tsipas, Georgios Tourountzas, and others. A mass organisation of IMRO (United) could, of course, not be set up in the brief time period of 1934 - 1936. Tsipas claimed that it had 893 members and Vlahov 700, figures that are perhaps exaggerated.\textsuperscript{37} Even so, the KKE zealously gave itself over to propagandising for the existence of a ‘Macedonian nation’. On 1 February 1935, the \textit{Communist Review} published a Greek translation of Vasil Ivanovski’s article ‘The Macedonian nationality’. Ivanovski was a journalist, political secretary of IMRO (United) in Bulgaria, but he had also studied in Moscow and thus had a theoretical training with which he could historically ground the ‘Macedonian nation’. He outlined a historically existent nation, which came from the admixture of the Ancient Macedonians (non Greeks) with the Slavs. These had created a state in the era of Samuel (10th-11th century), which, in its attempt in the 19th century to achieve its national fulfilment, had fallen victim to the assimilationist policy of the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians. As historical roots were added to the ‘Macedonian nation’, so the term
‘Macedonian’ acquired an existence and superseded the term ‘Slav-Macedonians’ in the publications.

After the failed Venizelist coup of 1 March 1935, the KKE replaced the slogan ‘Unified and Independent Macedonia’ with that of ‘full equality for minorities’. This change was justified by the change in the ethnological composition of Greek Macedonia, ‘closely connected to the conditions within which the revolutionary movement is developing generally in the Balkans today, and in particular in our country, with the anti-fascist and anti-war struggle as the main duty.’ In conclusion, it was noted: ‘the change of slogan is anything but a sign of weakness of our work in Macedonia and among the ethnic minorities. On the contrary, it is necessary, to strengthen our efforts to secure full rights for the minorities. The Party will not cease to declare that the Macedonian Question will only fully and completely be resolved in a brotherly way, after the victory of Soviet power in the Balkans, which shall tear apart the unjust conditions of the population exchanges and take all practical measures to extinguis\ of their imperialis\ injustices. Only in this way will the Macedonian People find their complete national fulfilment.’

At its Seventh Congress (December 1935), the KKE formalised the abandonment of its position for a ‘Unified and Independent Macedonia’, and adopted the line ‘full equality for minorities’. Its tactic moved within the logic of forming a popular anti-fascist front. But it always propagandised for the existence of a ‘Macedonian nation’, attempting at the same time to incorporate as members individuals from the Slav-Macedonian camp, in particular the younger generation that had attended Greek schools or even Greek universities.

The propagandistic activity of the KKE resulted in the formation of a core of Slav-Macedonian cadres, such as Lazaros Terpovski, Andreas Chipas, Paschalis Mitropoulos, Ilias Tourountzas, Giorgos Tourountzas and others. They may not have cut themselves off completely from their pro-Bulgarian roots, but they presented the Macedonian Question as a non-Bulgarian issue and linked its solution to the ‘socialist revolution’.

2.3. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the KPJ, illegal from 1921, did not initially involve itself with national questions. According to the official ideology, the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were seen as three clans of the same nation, and the socialist revolution was seen as a precondition for the settlement of national questions. When, in 1923-1924, the Communist International promoted a communist revolution in Bulgaria and the destabilisation of the Balkans, the Yugoslav communists, under pressure from Moscow, began to pay attention to the national questions. The problem according to the Communist International, was not the relegation of the settlement of national questions to the communist revolution, but the exploitation of the national questions to the benefit of the spread of communism. Two wings developed in the Yugoslav Communist Party: a ‘right’ wing, led by the Serb Sima Marković and a ‘left’ wing led mainly by Croats. In 1923 Marković published a leaflet entitled ‘The national question in the light of Marxism’, in which, taking the Stalinist terminology for the nation, he argued that the Croats and the Slovenes had the same right as Serbs to seek autonomy. The national question of Yugoslavia was in essence, according to Marković, a constitutional issue the resolution of which should be sought in the adoption of a federal constitution. The other wing emphasised the right of self-determination, without, however, necessarily interpreting this as secession. The fifth Congress of the Communist International (June – July 1924) took the decision to dissolve Yugoslavia, as a product of imperialism (secession of
Croatia, Slovenia, Unified and Independent Macedonia). Yet, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia did not adopt the Comintern line straightaway. In early 1925, Stalin himself intervened in the discussions of the Yugoslav communists, proposing the following solution: as long as Yugoslavia remained a capitalist state, the Party would support the peoples’ right to self-determination, including secession; but, in the event of a Soviet victory, it would apply the Soviet model, i.e. a federal system. Secession, according to Stalin, is not always the duty of Communists.

As for the Macedonian Question, the Yugoslav Communist Party initially considered it a Balkan Question (and not a Bulgarian one), and distinguished it from the general national question of Yugoslavia. It had always seen the intervention of the Bulgarian communists into its internal affairs as a reflection of their ambition to incorporate Serbian Macedonia into their zone of responsibility. As a result of profound Serb-Bulgarian antagonism in Serbian Macedonia, the Yugoslav Communist Party avoided characterising the region’s Slavic population Bulgarian or Serbian, simply referring to Macedonians and Macedonian population. The Yugoslav Communist Party found itself in a difficult position. On the one hand, it condemned the hegemony of ‘Greater Serbia’ in Serbian Macedonia; on the other, it defined IMRO as a terrorist, pro-Bulgarian chauvinist organisation, and not as a national-liberation one. In 1924, Kosta Novaković published the leaflet ‘Macedonia for the Macedonians – the land for the peasants’, in which he recognised the right of the Macedonians for self-determination. The Belgrade authorities responded with a wave of prosecutions against members of the Yugoslav Communist Party, and against Novaković himself.

The decision to dissolve Yugoslavia and establish independent states was taken by the Yugoslav Communist Party at Dresden in 1928, at the high point of the Serb-Croat conflict, once Marković had first been eliminated and the Serbian resistance weakened. In 1935 and following, in the light of the decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress for the creation of a unified anti-fascist front, the Yugoslav Communist Party began to shift orientation to the solution of a Yugoslav federation. Within the new political conditions, with the rise of Nazism in Germany, the break-up of Yugoslavia would have benefited Nazi Germany. In 1934, the Yugoslav Communist Party therefore recognised, in accordance with the Comintern decision, the existence of a ‘Macedonian nation’, which would be able to contest Bulgarian claims. At the fifth Congress of the Yugoslav Communist Party, which met in December 1934 at Ljubljana, it was decided to found the ‘Communist Party of Croatia, the Communist Party of Slovenia and, in the near future, the Communist Party of Macedonia.’

This was essentially the implementation of the January 1934 decision of the BLS. In 1937 the Communist Party of Croatia and Slovenia was founded, but it was not possible to establish a Communist Party of ‘Macedonia’ as members could not be found.

IMRO (United) groups had been formed in Yugoslav Macedonia. They did not, however, have any political influence, their relations with the Yugoslav Communist Party were problematic, and in 1928 they were completely dissolved by the Yugoslav authorities. In the guidelines he gave to the Yugoslav Communist Party after the fifth Congress of the Communist International, Poptomov emphasised to the Yugoslav Communist Party the need to refound IMRO (United), to publish a newspaper in the ‘Macedonian language’ in Serbian Macedonia, to found an IMRO (United) student group in Belgrade and Zagreb, to restore regular contact with Thessaloniki, which was destined as an IMRO (United) coordination centre, and to distribute in Serbian Macedonia a populist leaflet on the Macedonian Question and the duties of IMRO (United).

Yet, after the decision of the Comintern to dissolve IMRO (United), every attempt at reforming the organisation in Serbian Macedonia was abandoned. Even so, on the
initiative of the Yugoslav Communist Party, an organisation of Slav-Macedonian students (around 250 members) was formed in 1936 at the Universities of Zagreb and Belgrade, under the name ‘MANARO - Makedonski Naroden Pokret’ (Macedonian People’s Movements). Its political programme foresaw: 1) that the Macedonian people had the right to a free national life within a Yugoslav federation; 2) this right could only be implemented with the overthrow of the monarcho-fascist dictatorship and leadership and its replacement with widespread democracy; 3) for this reason, the Macedonian people must struggle alongside the other peoples and progressive powers in Yugoslavia to liberate political prisoners, for the freedom of speech and of the press, for the abolishment of all anti-democratic laws; 4) the Macedonian people seeks to restore diplomatic relations and the establishment of a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union; and, 5) to demand an immediate call for free parliamentary elections with a secret ballot.43

MANARO presented itself as a national, but at the same time democratic, antidictatorship organisation within the popular front. Even so, it could not find political partners in Yugoslavia. It attempted to form an alliance with the Agrarian Republican Croatian Party and the left wing of the Agrarian Serbian Party in the 1938 elections, but its efforts did not bear fruit. The Croatian leader Vladko Maček, who was fighting for Croatian autonomy, obviously did not want to ally with an anti-state organisation. For this reason he rejected the MANARO offer of an alliance with the argument that he was very preoccupied with Croatian issues. MANARO was limited to Yugoslav Macedonia and did not include Greek or Bulgarian Macedonia in its programme.

MANARO was not able to exercise significant political influence in Macedonia, and it ceased existing as a political organisation in 1939. Even so, a section of the new generation of Slav-Macedonian students and intellectuals, inclined towards the Yugoslav Communist Party, and former members of IMRO (United) agreed to propagande for the Comintern and Yugoslav Communist Party position on the existence of a Macedonian nation. Most characteristic is the case of the poet Kočo Racin, who wrote the poetic work ‘Beli Mugri’ (‘White Joy’) in the Slav-Macedonian idiom, publishing it in Samobor in Croatia in late 1939. In his poem, Racin described the terrible economic situation of villagers in Serbian Macedonia, and invited them to revolt. Racin had contacts with the Macedonian Literary Circle in Sofia. In August 1939, there was a Serb-Croat agreement to grant Croatia autonomy and for the participation of Croatians in the government. After this, in philological discussions within literary circles, former members of MANARO and IMRO (United) touched upon the issue of granting autonomy to Serbian Macedonia and the recognition of the Slav-Macedonians as a distinct people, as well as the codification of a Slav-Macedonian language. In an interesting discussion that Kočo Racin, Ljubo Arsov and Panko Brašnarov had with the Serbian university professors Vulić and Radović in December 1939, they insisted upon the existence of the Slav-Macedonians as a distinct nation, with roots in antiquity and the Middle Ages, and demanded that Serbian Macedonia be granted the same things that the Croats had achieved. The Serbian professors, who used historical arguments and defended the policy of Serbisation, were completely negative to these suggestions. Vulić argued the following:

‘What do you Macedonians want? You want autonomy like the Croats. The Croats sacrificed their language, which is Kajkavian and Chakavian [dialects of Serbo-Croat] and adopted a language that is not theirs, the Shtokavian [a dialect of Serbo-Croat spoken in Serbia]. You would want to use your Macedonian language as a scholarly language. But, what would be the gain? In Germany, the Prussian doesn’t at all understand the Bavarian, but they are together. People unite… What would you gain with the use of
your language in schools? There will then start a battle for the prevalence of the dialects. I do not see any gain from the name Macedonian. It is deceptive to trace your descent to Alexander the Great. I understand, you are asking for rights, but it will be easier to gain them with us rather than alone. If the Croatians had not had a sovereign state in the past (council, banat, etc.) they would never have asked for the things they asked for. You are asking for something you never had. You are young idealists and are deluded... I never heard a Skopjan say he is a Macedonian. You grew up in this environment, you are called Macedonians and want your language. I, on the other hand, know many people from this area who say that they are Serbs...

Professor Radović was more condemnatory:

“We cannot recognise you as a national distinction. I say this as a politician... It is true that without the Morava and Vardar valley we cannot exist. It is the spinal cord of our Yugoslavia. The idea is that the state unites all our powers so that we can hold on. Government must be improved and we must be equal. Croatia has a particular form of life and for this reason has the right to autonomy. If we had granted this autonomy earlier, today we would have had greater cohesion... We shall improve our government and grant you full equality... We cannot, and we shall not permit the recognition of the national peculiarity of the Macedonians for political reasons. We must correct the mistakes and you must learn the common language, and that’s it.”

As already mentioned, a Communist Party of Macedonia was not founded, and there were only a very few members of the KPJ in Serbian Macedonia. Since the situation in Serbian Macedonia remained confused, after an agreement with Tito, in the spring of 1940 Dimitrov sent Metodija Šatorov from Moscow to Serbian Macedonia as Secretary of a Regional Committee within the KPJ. Šatorov was a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party and a former member of IMRO (United). The fact that a member of the BCP had undertaken the reorganisation of the party bases in Serbian Macedonia demonstrates that the Bulgarian communists aspired to play an important role in a future settlement to the Macedonian Question. In 1940, Tito, who had already returned to Yugoslavia from Moscow, became Secretary of the Central Committee of the KPJ. At the fifth Congress of the KPJ (October 1940) the right of the Macedonian people to equality within a Yugoslav federation was recognised. In the terminology of the Yugoslav Communists, the term ‘people’ meant sovereign nation.

The ideology of ‘Macedonianism’ was an alternative solution to the antagonism of the Balkan states for influence within the wider Macedonian region. In contrast with the case of Misirkov, there were now political powers that supported a Slav-Macedonian solution. The short-term political goals of the Comintern were, of course, not achieved. IMRO (United) was disbanded and Bulgaria proceeded to join the Axis powers. But Slav-Macedonianism remained a national choice. That this development was not irreversible – to the degree that Bulgaria could fulfil its ‘historical’ mission – was a logical assumption. Even so, developments during the Second World War proved to favour the Slav-Macedonian solution, with the KPJ as the main player, turning the Macedonian Question into a Yugoslav one.
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Notes

1. For an initial approach, see Sp. Sfetas, Opseis tou Makedonikou Zitimatos ston 20o aiona [Aspects of the Macedonian Question in the 20th century], Thessaloniki 2001, pp. 55-78.
5. On these debates, see Sfetas, Makedonien, pp. 434-440.
7. Rossjiski Centr Hranenija i Izuchenija Dokumentov Novejší Istorii (henceforth RCHIDNI, Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Records of Contemporary History), Fond 509 (henceforth F-Series), Opis 1, (henceforth Op-
Catalogue), Delo 164 (henceforth D-File), Confidential, Letter from Poptomov to the Secretariat of the Balkan States, 15/11/1933.


9. It has not been possible to locate the proposal in the Archives.


19. The interview (1975) with Mihalis Keramitzis, member of the KKE before the war and leading cadre of SNOF and NOF during the Occupation and the Civil War is revealing. ‘Then [1939] I had no idea about such things: Macedonians, Macedonia, Macedonian Question, Committee, etc. The same went for all our Macedonian cadres. I felt the same thing that a Greek communist felt. To the extent that I felt something different as a Slav, I felt that I was a Bulgarian...’ See E. Kofos, ‘To Makedoniko stis scheseis KKE-KKY kata ta teli tou 1944’ [‘The Macedonian Question in the relations between the KKE and the Yugoslav Communist Party in late 1944’], in the collective volume *Makedonia kai Thraki 1941-1944. Katachi-Antistasi-Apelefitheiroi [Macedonia and Thrace. Occupation-Resistance-Liberation]*, IMXA (269), Thessaloniki 1998, p. 131.


22. See D. Dobrinov, *VMRO (Obedinena) [IMRO (United)]*, Sofia 1993, pp. 223-224.


26. See Dobrinov, *op. cit.*, p. 236. In 1937, when the successor to the throne and former Prime Minister of Bulgaria Simeon was born, King Boris granted a general amnesty.

27. See *Makedonski Vest!, God. II, 12. VII. 1936 [Macedonian News, Year 2].


35. See Kirjazovski, _op. cit._, p. 110.
36. See VMRO (Obedineta). _Dokumenti i Materiali, Kniga II_, [IMRO (United). Documents and Material, Vol. A], ed. I. Katardiev], Skopje 1992, pp. 276-278. In a letter to _Rizospastis_, one ‘Macedonian’ wrote: ‘Here in Florina the terrorism is unbearable. Decent Macedonians are dragged to the courts on heavy charges, and because they don’t know the Greek language they call them Bulgarians. The Greek dynasts should know that we aren’t Bulgarians, or Serbs or Greeks, but true Macedonians with the history of the liberation of Macedonia behind us’. See _Rizospastis_, 1/12/1934.
37. See S. Sfetas, Aspects of the Macedonian Question, p. 76.
40. Revealing of this transformation in identity is the statement of Michalis Keramitzis, a member of SNOF during the Occupation and NOF during the Civil War: ‘Only the Greek Communists would talk always about the Macedonians, about Macedonia, they defended this position in the courts and were convicted. It was from inside the KKE and from the KKE, from the Greek Communists and not from the Macedonians, that I began to learn that I’m a Macedonian. That’s the truth.’ See E. Kofos, _op. cit._, p. 131.
43. See K. Miljovski, _op. cit._, p. 148-149.
45. See Katardžiev, _op. cit._, pp. 381-382.