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***Aegean Macedonians
and the Bulgarian Identity Politics***

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AEGEAN MACEDONIANS
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THE BULGARIAN IDENTITY POLITICS

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The objective of my paper is to reconstruct the context of identity politics adopted by communist Bulgaria (1944-1989) with regard to the national integration of Slav-speaking refugees from the Greek Civil war. It is based mostly on archival research and focuses on the official campaign of resettlement from other East European countries into Bulgaria of political emigrants originating from Greek or Aegean Macedonia¹ as well as on the special measures taken by the Bulgarian communist Party and state leadership in order to homogenize this new and, to a large extent, different from the traditional pro-Bulgarian one Macedonian immigration. The basic intention of this paper is to make possible an analytical perspective towards the problem of national identity in its relation to diverse state institutional strategies. The Bulgarian identity politics are investigated with regard to their constitutive function concerning both *national* identity of refugees and their identity *as refugees*. A critical understanding of these problems is meant to deconstruct both the traditional nationalistic views of the latter, the multiculturalist dogma of “objectively” existing minorities and the reifying concepts of refugee experience presented as a result of a “*traumatic uprooting*”. That is the reason why the paper is divided into two parts, the first one referring to Party and state directives and concrete actions, while the second one concerns the responses thereof and the choices made by the refugees themselves. The latter are labeled as *Aegean Macedonians*, which seems to be the most popular self-identification of Slav-speaking refugees from Greek Civil war who could otherwise share diverse national identities – “Macedonians”, “Bulgarians” or “Greeks”.

From Greek Political Emigrants to Bulgarian Citizens: The Aegean Macedonian Refugees in Bulgaria

The withdrawal of Bulgarian occupation army from the central and eastern areas of Greek Macedonia in the autumn of 1944 marked the mass departure for Bulgaria of Slav-speakers originating from nowadays Serres and Drama prefectures. According to an agreement between the Bulgarian and Yugoslav Party and state leadership, since the summer of 1945, these refugees were systematically transferred to Yugoslavia, mostly to Vojvodina and to the republic of Macedonia – a process extensively studied by Bulgarian historians who claim the number of 18.000 people (Daskalov 1996: 277, 288-298; Daskalov 2000: 165-168; Mi_ev 1994: 94-96). Yet, the beginning of the Greek Civil war in 1946 brought other Greek and Slav-speaking refugees to Bulgaria, also partially relocated to other East European communist states. Their resettlement in Yugoslavia was however stopped in the beginning of 1948² and especially after Tito-Stalin conflict that followed in the same year. A special case of refugees were the so-called “refugee children” who, since the beginning of 1948, were “evacuated” or “kidnapped” by the Communist Party of Greece (CPG, or KKE in Greek). According to the established by the Greek communists “Committee for the Assistance to Children” (EVOP), in June 1949, there were about 11.000 children transferred to Yugoslavia,

¹ The term “Aegean Macedonia” being used nowadays in the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria, while in Greece the same region is named simply “Macedonia”.

² CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 493, L. 3.

while 5.000 were sent to Romania, 2.500 to Poland, 3.000 to Czechoslovakia³, 2.500 to Hungary, 700 to East Germany and 2.500 to Bulgaria (Kirjazovski 1989: 37).

The Greek government's assault on the Democratic Army of Greece's main forces on Vitsi/Vi_o Mountain in the summer of 1949 marked the final defeat of the communist-led resistance and, on August 29 and 30, the last divisions of the Democratic Army of Greece quit their refuge on Grammos Mountain. Threatened by the governmental repression, the combatants moved to Albania and Bulgaria, as Yugoslavia had closed its border. As a result, the 6th and the 7th division of the Democratic Army of Greece with another part of civilians from Northern Greece fled to Bulgaria (Kirjazovski 1989: 55). The Third conference of the CPG, held in October 1949, acknowledged the migration of 55.881 people from Greece into the East European communist countries and in the USSR, about 20.000 of whom were held to be (Slavo-)Macedonians⁴. Some 11.997 soldiers of the Democratic Army of Greece were transported from Albania and Bulgaria to the Soviet Union, mostly to the Uzbek republic, while 11.941 refugees settled in Czechoslovakia, 11.475 in Poland, 9.100 in Romania, 7.253 in Hungary and 3.071 in Bulgaria (Kirjazovski 1989: 53-55).

According to Bulgarian official estimations, in the autumn of 1949, 20.000 refugees crossed the Bulgarian border and about 4000 of them remained in the country⁵. Following a general meeting of the communist parties held on November 15, 1953 in Bucharest, the “*popular democracies*” in East Europe were supposed to assist the process of reunification of the refugee families which concerned exclusively the cases of parents with minor children and of spouses⁶. This was the starting point of a huge resettlement of Greek political emigrants that affected all the East European communist countries. The first more considerable migrations to Bulgaria are reported in 1954-1955 and concern people previously residing in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and the USSR⁷. The latter were to be hosted by the Bulgarian Red Cross while the local Party committees together with the Municipalities were supposed to provide them housing and employment. The Greek Communist Party representatives in Bulgaria were supposed to address the information on problems faced by refugees to the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) direction that had to “solve” them through the assistance of the Greek “comrades”. As a result, a long series of complaints and demands concerning everyday life difficulties started to be addressed directly to the Central Committee of the BCP, forwarded through the so-called “Commission” of the Greek political emigrants⁸.

Already in 1950, the Central Committee of the BCP charged its section for “International relations” (*otdel Me_dunarodni vrázki*) with the solution of everyday life problems faced by the refugees from Greece⁹. A special sector named “Political emigrants” (*politemigranti*) was established within the framework of the latter with the purpose to “control and assist” the employment and the accommodation of the refugees as well as the attribution of pensions to the disabled people, the enrollment of youngsters in Bulgarian education institutions etc. In 1952, the Bulgarian Communist Party leadership allowed the

³Already in May 1948, the leaders of the Communist Party of Greece insisted the majority of children to be relocated from Yugoslavia to Czechoslovakia, obviously conscious of the worsening relations between Tito and Stalin (Brown 2003: 14).

⁴Brown accepts the number of 22.822 people (Brown 2003: 19).

⁵CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 4291, L. 23-26.

⁶CPA, F.1, OP.6, A.E. 1936.

⁷CPA, F.1, OP. 32, A.E. 426.

⁸CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 427, 429, 430, 431, 500 etc. There were also smaller organizations of the officers, of the women, a section of the “Slavo-Macedonian” political organization “Ilinden” etc. – see CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 304.

⁹CPA, F.1, OP.6, A.E. 1170.

admission of some of the refugees to the Party¹⁰. Two years later, the Central Committee's Politburo voted measures "for the improvement of the ideological-political formation and of the professional education of the emigrants from Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey"¹¹ targeted at the accommodation, the employment, and the insertion of political emigrants in "the system of the Party education". It concerned mostly refugees from Greece who were the most numerous – 3682, according to the official data. The resolution encouraged the admission of political emigrants to the BCP. "Greek" refugees were also admitted to the Military academy in Sofia and to the Bulgarian army¹². Series of measures concerned the betterment of their life conditions and especially the accommodation of the children¹³. Special pensions for "exceptional merits" were granted to communist activists from the Greek resistance movement¹⁴. Since 1958, the refugees have been also granted the right to become members of the BCP without the obligation to accept Bulgarian citizenship¹⁵.

Otherwise consentient to the fulfillment of Greek Communist Party's requests, the Bulgarian communist leaders did not agree to the creation of a political organization of the refugees. After the insistence of the GCP's leader Apostolos Grozos, the Bulgarian Party direction allowed only the creation of a "cultural-educative association" of Greek political emigrants in Bulgaria, which was called "Democratic organization for culture and education" (DOME)¹⁶. In 1961, this organization consolidated the so-called "Greek emigrants' clubs" in the country and took up the publishing of Greek emigrants' newspaper *Lefteria*. About 5.000 people were expected to join the DOME, while Grozos insisted on the nomination of one "Macedonian" in its direction¹⁷.

The policy of communist Bulgaria towards the refugees from Greece was, at least initially, not discriminative with regard to their ethnic origin: Greek- and Slav-speakers were both categorized as *Greek political emigrants (grăcki politemigranti)* and received equal treatment by state authorities. However, certain institutions of communist Bulgaria, charged with the national policy, tried progressively to promote certain selection among them privileging Slav-speakers, frequently named *Aegean Macedonians (egejski makedonci)*, and to prescribe special measures for the attainment of their "ethnic" loyalty. Already in 1950, the Bulgarian authorities tried to achieve, at least partially, the return to Bulgaria of the refugees from Central and East Greek Macedonia who have been in the meantime transferred to Yugoslavia. A resolution of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the BCP from February 1950 urged the Yugoslav government to allow the return to Bulgaria of "political and other refugees from Aegean Macedonia and monarch-fascist Greece who searched for a protection in Bulgaria because of their national self-consciousness (*nacionalno samo uvstvije*), property interests" etc.¹⁸. In fact, the development of Bulgarian policy on "Macedonian question" went clearly in the direction of reaffirmation of the "Bulgarian

¹⁰ CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 2428, L. 3; CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 304. Some of the emigrants changed several times their Party affiliation (CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 2667).

¹¹ CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 2191 from June 8, 1954. It reorganized the Central Committee's section International relations dealing with political emigrants, creating two subdivisions – for the "Greek" and the "Yugoslav" emigrants.

¹² CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 2280, 2295, 2684.

¹³ See for instance CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 2558, 2593 from 1955. Since 1957, a special amount is provided in the State budget for the needs of Greek political emigrants in Bulgaria and of political prisoners in Greece – CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 3443.

¹⁴ CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 6075; CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 237, 475 etc.

¹⁵ CPA, F.1, OP.8, A.E. 4701. Later, in 1964, their children were granted the same right – CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 5679.

¹⁶ In Greek: *Dimokratiki Organosi Morfosis ke Ekpolitismou ton Politikon Prosfigon apo tin Ellada sti Laiiki Dimokratia tis Voulgarias*.

¹⁷ CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 4641 from December 20, 1961.

¹⁸ CPA, F.1, OP.8, A.E. 1145, L. 1-2.

national belonging” of the Slavic population of geographic Macedonia including the Slav-speaking refugees from the Greek Civil war. When in the autumn of 1956, the Greek political emigrants in Hungary were facing the hostile attitude of the Hungarian anti-communist rebels, the Bulgarian ambassador reportedly declared the readiness of his country to accept all the refugees and especially the Macedonians who wanted to be transferred to Bulgaria (Kirjazovski 1989: 119, 122).

Thus, since the mid-1950s, number of Aegean Macedonians forwarded through Bulgarian diplomatic channels demands to settle in this country. The propaganda of the “hospitality of socialist Bulgaria” was entrusted to the so-called “Slavic Committee” (*Slavjanski komitet*) in Sofia, which started diffusing printed and other materials concerning the history and culture of Bulgaria and Macedonia in the Aegean Macedonian refugee centers in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania. The Bulgarian officials likewise promised the emigrants accommodation and employment. In 1959, the Slavic Committee plan concerned also the Macedonian combatants from the Democratic Army of Greece living in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, many of whom were willing to change their country of residence¹⁹. Some of the former Aegean Macedonian political leaders subsequently settled in Bulgaria. For instance, the leader of the “Slavo-Macedonian” *Ilinden* organization Pando Vajnas was given opportunity to make his carrier in the Bulgarian army²⁰. Another important Aegean Macedonian activist – Kostas _aperas – received scholarship in order to continue his education in Sofia, settled in Bulgaria and accepted Bulgarian citizenship²¹.

However, the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s was marked by a decisive turn in the “Macedonian” policy of Bulgaria, which did not recognize anymore the existence of a Macedonian ethnicity different from the Bulgarian one. As a result, the trend to a discriminative policy vis-à-vis the refugees from Greece – more targeted at the Slav-speakers and less to “ethnic Greeks” – was given a certain proselytizing aspect. In 1960, the Bulgarian Communist Party’s Politburo voted a special resolution “*On the resettlement in our country of Macedonians – political emigrants from other socialist countries*”²². Additional documents specified that lots of Greeks “*and especially of Macedonians express their spontaneous will to settle in Bulgaria*” referring to the number of demands addressed to Bulgarian embassies, to the Ministry of Exterior and to the Party’s Central Committee. The latter are explained “*with the fact that almost all of them [the “political emigrants of Macedonian origin” - T.M.] have a clear Bulgarian national consciousness and consider Bulgaria their homeland*”²³. The political activity of Yugoslavia among them was to be countered: according to the Party activists, the Yugoslav “Titoists” (*titovci*) were “*lying to them they will offer them better life conditions*” in the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia.

Starting a real competition with Yugoslavia for the destiny of the Slav-speaking refugees, the Bulgarian authorities allowed immigration “*mostly to Macedonians*” from Poland and, only between 1958 and 1960, about 2.300 people have been accepted in Bulgaria. The section for International relations of the Party’s Central Committee was “*convinced the issue of the resettlement of Macedonian political emigrants is to be finally resolved in a radical way and bigger groups should be allowed to move successively to our country*”²⁴. Brothers, sisters and cousins of those who were already accommodated in Bulgaria were also admitted, contrary to the previous politics of “reunification of families” restrained to spouses

¹⁹CDA, F. 141, OP. 7, A.E. 108, L. 17.

²⁰ CPA, F.1, OP.8, A.E. 4578.

²¹ CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 930 – from 1950; CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 792, L. 44 from 1957.

²² From October 20, 1960, in CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 4291.

²³ CPA, *Ibid.*, L. 23-24.

²⁴ CPA, *Ibid.*, L. 25.

and parents with minor children²⁵. According to a Bulgarian statistical report, at the end of 1962, the political emigrants from Greece numbered 6.529 people²⁶. The data show clearly that the immigration of refugees into the country was intensified especially in the beginning of the 1960s²⁷.

The “Regular Commission for Foreign Affairs” of the National Assembly of Bulgaria also suggested that all the emigrants from Aegean Macedonia in the socialist countries “*feeling themselves Bulgarians*” should be given the possibility to settle in Bulgaria while the formal procedures of immigration should be simplified: “*It is in the very interest of the socialism and the national cause of Bulgaria that the desiring [to settle in Bulgaria – T.M.] Aegean Macedonian emigrants establish themselves in Bulgaria instead... in Skopje.*”²⁸ Similarly, it is recommended that “*young Aegeans*” should be invited to study in Bulgaria, while all the emigrants should be given the possibility to spend their holidays in the country. Macedonian students, especially from Poland and Czechoslovakia, were to be invited in Bulgaria for small periods in order to be acquainted “*in an appropriate way*” with the “*historical, linguistic and national question*”²⁹. In 1961, the emphasis on the Aegean Macedonian refugees is reaffirmed also by the Bulgarian government which recognized the years of work spent by Greek political emigrants in other socialist countries specifying that this concerned in particular “*Macedonians who have immigrated or will immigrate into our country from other socialist countries*”³⁰. By the same time, the Bulgarian embassy in Belgrade urged the government in Sofia to accept “*Aegeans*” (*egejci*) with reportedly “*well-conserved Bulgarian consciousness*” who were disappointed from their life conditions in the city of Tetovo, West Yugoslav Macedonia³¹. The employees insisted on the Bulgarian administration to accelerate the formal procedures in order to “*save*” them from the “*anti-Bulgarian propaganda*” in Yugoslavia.

In this manner, the Bulgarian authorities asserted their special concern about the national commitment of Slav-speaking Greek political emigrants while the “*patriotic*” education of those who arrived in Bulgaria was entrusted to state institutions dealing with the national policy like the so-called “*Union of Macedonian Cultural-Educative Associations*” (*Sâjuz na makedonskite kulturno-prosvetni dru_estva*). Since, the beginning of the 1960s, this institution was instrumental in the official nationalist promotion of the Bulgarian perspective on the “*Macedonian question*” mostly among Bulgarian citizens originating from Macedonia. Already in 1952, the Union’s chairman Hristo Kalajd_iev informed the Macedonian Associations in some cities with larger immigrant milieus from Greek Macedonia like Plovdiv, Pazard_ik, Burgas and Stalin (Varna) that “*there is possibility our compatriots from*

²⁵ See CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 729.

²⁶ CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 1387 – a Report of the Central Statistical Administration from October 15, 1963.

²⁷ CPA, Ibid., L. 3 – if since 1951 they vary from 55 up to 149 per year, in 1957 they are 388, in 1961 – 479, 1962 – 451 etc. In 1963, still the largest part of the refugees has come directly from Greece – 2632, the second state was Poland – 1098. 216 were already members of the BCP, 660 – of the Komsomol. 4199 spoke Bulgarian. The men numbered 3731, while the women – 2798. 1711 refugees originated from Thrace – prefectures of Evros, Dimotiki, Soflou, 781 from Kastoria, 579 from Serres, 347 from Florina, 232 from Xanthi, 205 from Thessaloniki, 124 from Drama etc. Curiously enough, about 1331 of the Greek political emigrants were born in Bulgaria itself. Actually, a part of the “*ethnic Greeks*” willing to migrate to Bulgaria were *refugees from Bulgaria* who had left their birthplaces in the mid-1920s after the convention for “*voluntary exchange*” of population between Bulgaria and Greece. Born in towns and villages in the southern and southeast parts of the country like Stanimachos/Asenovgrad, Kavakli/Topolovgrad, Anchialo/Pomorie etc., they were firstly transferred to Northern Greece (Thrace and Macedonia) that they had to leave during and after the Civil war. They came back to Bulgaria but this time as *refugees from Greece*.

²⁸CDA, F. 141, OP. 10, A.E. 18, L. 14.

²⁹CDA, Ibid., L. 17.

³⁰ CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 4406 from 11/03/1961.

³¹ AMVnR, OP. 10P, D. 98, PR. 1381 from 1960.

Aegean Macedonia who, in the last years, migrated to the popular democracies, to be allowed to settle here...”³². In fact, many of the Union’s leaders and members originated from Greek or Aegean Macedonia and had relatives among the Greek Civil war refugees. Therefore, the Union’s chairman urged the activists to invite their relatives in the country. The Macedonian Associations started likewise organizing cultural programs and meetings (*drugarski sre_t*) for Slav-speaking refugees who in the meantime migrated to Bulgaria³³. Meanwhile, in the ideological language of the Union of the Macedonian Associations, the term “Macedonian” was gradually replaced with “Bulgarian” or identified with the latter. At the Union’s Plenum of April 1961, the leader of Sofia’s Macedonian Association declared one should distinguish among the Greek political emigrants “*Greeks and Bulgarians from Macedonia*”, as the latter should be drawn in the network of the Associations³⁴. In the same time, the historian (and activist of the Union) Dino Kjosev appealed for the granting of Bulgarian citizenship to the “*ethnic Bulgarians*” among the political emigrants from Greece (as Greek citizens their membership in the Associations not being possible). In 1965, the activists reasserted their interest in the participation also of Greek citizens otherwise “*Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia*” in the Union’s cultural activities³⁵.

The same organization was supposed to issue personal characteristics for “*anti-fascist activity*” the political emigrants needed in order to be admitted to diverse state and Party institutions³⁶. Their involvement in the World War II and the Greek Civil war was officially recognized by the Bulgarian communist state as “*anti-fascist activity*” and symbolically identified with the struggles of Bulgarian communist partisan movement between 1941 and 1944. The Slavic Committee also provided certificates for anti-fascist activity to the Slav-speakers who were eventually listed as “*Bulgarians from Aegean Macedonia*”³⁷. These certificates served to obtain a special state pension of communist combatant just like the *bore_ka penzija*, granted to the Aegean Macedonian refugees in Yugoslav Macedonia³⁸. But in the latter, the same activity was treated as a part of the so-called “*National-Liberation Struggle of the Macedonian people*”, partially directed against “*the Bulgarian fascists*”. The Slavic Committee and the Union of Macedonian Associations likewise granted scholarships to “*Aegean youngsters*” (*mlade_i egejci*) particularly for studying in Sofia University³⁹.

The fact that Bulgaria’s policy towards the political emigrants residing in other communist countries privileged refugees of Slavic origin provoked even certain tensions between Aegean Macedonians and Greeks as reported in 1961-1962⁴⁰. Apparently, the Greek-speaking emigrants also relied on the possibility to settle in Bulgaria as a first step to their final return to the homeland. Similarly, the Bulgarian-Yugoslav controversy on the “*Macedonian question*” was also transferred in the emigrants’ centers in East Europe. In 1961, pro-Yugoslav Poland-based organizations protested against the resettling of Aegean refugees in Bulgaria as well as against the diffusion of Bulgarian newspapers and literature in their milieus (Kirjazovski 1989: 215-216). From a mainstream Macedonian point of view, the

³² CDA, F. 299, OP. 2, A.E. 3, L. 98.

³³ CDA, F. 299, OP. 1, A.E. 9, L. 87-89. “*Aegean congratulations*” (*egejski pozdravi*) are addressed by the representative of the “*Aegean political emigrants*” (*egejski politemigranti*) Hristo Argirov at the General Conference of the Associations in April 1950 – CDA, F. 299, OP. 1, A.E. 7. At the same conference the issues concerning these new refugees are among the most discussed topics.

³⁴ CDA, F. 299, OP. 4, A.E. 5, L. 38.

³⁵ CPA, F. 1, OP. 40, A.E. 25, L. 1.

³⁶ CDA, F. 299, OP. 2, A.E. 6, L. 43.

³⁷ See CDA, F. 141, OP. 11, A.E. 143, A.E. 144.

³⁸ In the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, the Aegeans (*egejci*) were largely instrumentalized in the promotion of Macedonian ethnic nationalism (Monova 2001: 185-197).

³⁹ CDA, F. 299, OP. 1, A.E. 14, L. 178.

⁴⁰ CDA, F. 141, OP. 7, A.E. 92, L. 3. The Bulgarian historian Georgi Daskalov characterizes the wish of “*ethnic Greek*” refugees to get closer to their country as “*narrowly egoistic*” (Daskalov 1996: 302-303).

migration to Bulgaria was seen as a dangerous trend as long as it actually implied a compromise with the Macedonian national identity, the latter being sponsored by the Yugoslav identity politics.

Indeed, the Slav-speaking refugees who settled in Bulgaria had sooner or later to face the Bulgarian official political stance on “Macedonian question”. Already in February 1950, similarly to other political emigrants from Greece residing in East European countries, a “*group of Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia living in the town of Petri_*” insisted on the creation of a political organization of the Aegean refugees established in Bulgaria’s Pirin region⁴¹. The foundation of such an organization was however not allowed (Resolution of the Politburo from 20/04/1950) as the Party already considered every such attempt as “anti-national” and inspired by Tito’s Yugoslavia. A series of measures concerning the group of Petri_ and Aegean Macedonian emigrants in general were proposed: deportation inside the country, intensification of the political propaganda among the Slav-speaking refugees, nomination of special agents of the local committees of the Party charged with the “*correct organization*” of the political emigrants from Greece⁴².

Ten years later, some of the newcomers were still not prepared for the new Bulgarian identity politics on the “Macedonian question” that, since the end of the 1950s, was denying the existence of a separate Macedonian ethnicity. When some “*youngsters from Aegean Macedonia*”, established in the city of Pleven, manifested Macedonian national identity, their political activity was suppressed by the local and the central leadership of the Union of Macedonian Associations⁴³. In 1963, the Union’s president Kalajd_iev wrote to the local association: “*Like in many other places, in your city too, those [Greek political emigrants – T.M.] who are from Macedonian origin manifest with some fanatic perseverance Macedonian nationalism. Hence, they provoke quarrels with the Greek leadership and on the basis of this Macedonian nationalism they try to consolidate all the [Macedonian – T.M.] diaspora in Bulgaria. This stands in contradiction to the policy of our Party and of the Greek Party also*”. Therefore, one had to stop “*their attempts to make the older refugees from Macedonia in Bulgaria Macedonian nationalists. Those [previous refugees – T.M.] have come to Bulgaria with a solid Bulgarian consciousness*”. The same letter recommended preventing “*every interference of these people in the life of our Association*”, while keeping the “*door open*” if they wanted to attend public meetings of cultural character⁴⁴.

After their visit to Sofia in December 1967, the Greek communist leaders Apostolos Grozos and Dimitris Partsalidis mentioned unsuccessful demands of refugees transferred to Bulgaria from Poland to have a page in Macedonian language in the Greek political refugees’ weekly *Lefteria* (Kirjazovski 1989: 259)⁴⁵. Thus, the state and Party institutions dealing with the national policy had to face cases of a challenging ethnic self-identification of Aegean Macedonian refugees from the Greek Civil war. A clear distinction had to be established between the previous Macedonian migration waves to Bulgaria (from the beginning of the 20th century) and the newcomers: contrary to older pro-Bulgarian refugees, those who came after the Greek Civil war had more “Macedonist” character and needed the application of special strategies of national “homogenization”.

⁴¹ The demand itself is to be found in CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 765, L. 5. It is dated 15/02/1950 and undersigned by Georgi Angelov Gocev. It seems the petition was firstly addressed to the Sofia-based Union of Macedonian Cultural-Educative Associations, which forwarded it to the Central Committee of the Party with the recommendation “*to take the needed measures*” (CDA, F. 299, OP. 1, A.E. 14, L. 47).

⁴² CPA, *Ibid.*, L. 1-3. In 1949-1950, the Bulgarian authorities together with the Greek communist leadership sent “*Tito’s agents*” from Greece in Bulgarian communist camps like Belene (Kirjazovski 1989: 252-255).

⁴³ CDA, F. 299, OP. 4, A.E. 2, L. 26 – from 1961.

⁴⁴ See the original in CDA, F. 299, OP. 4, A.E. 9, L. 48-49.

⁴⁵ In 1948, the page in Macedonian language of *Lefteria* was suppressed.

Rather bothering aspect was the national “orientation” of the younger generation of refugees – namely, of the students from “*the Aegean diaspora*” (*egejskata emigracija*) who were already enrolled in Bulgarian universities. A special resolution of the Secretariat of the BCP’s Central Committee charged the Slavic Committee with “*the restitution of the Bulgarian national consciousness*” of “*the children of Macedonian Bulgarians from the Aegean diaspora*”⁴⁶. The directives concerned also the children of political emigrants residing in other communist countries who were regularly invited to spend their holidays in Bulgaria. However, as a report of the Slavic Committee from 1970 points out, many of the Aegean Macedonian youngsters residing or studying in Bulgaria did not have “*a clear national consciousness*”, i.e. a Bulgarian one⁴⁷. In order to “*clarify (izbistri) their national consciousness (nacionalnoto im saznanie) and to give them a good patriotic formation*”, the Slavic Committee proposed a number of measures to be taken together with the deans of university faculties, the institutes for foreign students, the Komsomol and Party organizations in the higher education institutions. The “patriotic” education of the younger political emigrants included diverse cultural programs, lectures on historical matters, involvement in official commemorations etc.

In the same time, the Party’s decision to grant Bulgarian citizenship and to allow settling in Bulgaria of “*our compatriots from the Aegean Macedonian diaspora (emigracija) in the socialist countries*” was once again especially emphasized by the activists of the Slavic Committee. The procedure of “repatriation” to Bulgaria was once again to be accelerated. A discrimination of refugees from the Greek Civil war according to their ethnic belonging was likewise recommended: for national propagandist institutions like the Slavic Committee and the Union of Macedonian Associations, Aegean Macedonians were visibly more desirable than “ethnic Greeks”. As a result of this policy, in the beginning of the 1970s, the number of political emigrants from Greece rose to 7531 (Daskalov 1996: 313). However, due to the obtaining of Bulgarian citizenship or to the return of a part of them in Greece, in 1978, there were only 4383 people enlisted as “*Greek political emigrants*” in Bulgaria, including Greek and Slav-speakers.

In general, the applicants for immigration into Bulgaria needed only to declare they had relatives who could provide their housing or to undersign a declaration they were ready to be sent to villages (where accommodation was easier to be found) and to work in the agricultural sector. Yet, after their arrival, the majority of the political emigrants started leaving the villages and searching for an employment and accommodation in the bigger towns and cities⁴⁸. Most of the refugees were given professional formation in big Central and East European cities like Budapest, Brno or Wrocław, and the fact that they were sometimes sent to villages provoked certain dissatisfaction among them. Many of them were disappointed because of the impossibility to inhabit big cities like Sofia, Varna or Plovdiv while the Ministry of Labor and Social Care was often not prepared to provide them with accommodations in the desired places. The Slavic Committee was therefore obliged to face their complaints after their arrival in Bulgaria and urged state institutions to be more careful and cooperative while addressing their needs, and especially those of the Aegean Macedonian “compatriots”⁴⁹.

Following a request by the CPG’s leader Grozos, since 1965, the Bulgarian administration facilitated the formal procedures needed for repatriation in Greece⁵⁰ but this process was intensified only after 1974 and the fall of the Colonels’ regime. In January 1978,

⁴⁶ CDA, F. 141, OP. 8, A.E. 17, L. 68-69.

⁴⁷ NA-BAN, F. 88, OP. 3, A.E. 58, L. 23.

⁴⁸ CPA, F. 1, OP. 6, A.E. 4291, L. 25. See also CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 792, L. 60.

⁴⁹ NA-BAN, F. 88, OP. 3, A.E. 58, L. 20.

⁵⁰ CPA, F. 1, OP. 8, A.E. 6862.

Bulgaria and Greece signed a convention on the transfer of the pensions of repatriated political emigrants, which concerned only the refugees who achieved their age of pension in Bulgaria and was not applied for those who went back to Greece beforehand (Kirjazovski 1989: 157). Another large part of the refugees returned to Greece after the Papandreou's governmental decree of 1982 granting the right to return to all political emigrants considering themselves "*Greeks by birth*" (*Ellines to genos*). As a result, in 1984, the cultural organization of the Greek political emigrants in Bulgaria (DOME) ceased to exist, following a resolution of the Secretariat of the BCP's Central Committee. The same resolution marked the end of the status of *political emigrants* for the people who were born in Greece and settled in Bulgaria after 1944 (Daskalov 1996: 464).

Thus in the 1980s, the Slav-speaking refugees who remained in Bulgaria lost even their last symbolic difference vis-à-vis the other Bulgarian citizens – the identity of *refugees* "expelled" from their "homeland". Contrary to the Republic of Macedonia and other countries in East Europe, the Aegean Macedonians in Bulgaria were and are not organized in associations or other institutions representing special collective claims of theirs, although a small part of them have certain connection with the Association of Child-Refugees in Skopje and other transnational Macedonian NGOs⁵¹. Some refugees from the Greek Civil war considering themselves of Bulgarian origin achieved popularity in the Bulgarian public life and were even involved in a quite active way in the historiographic and linguistic argument with the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia that began in the late 1960s⁵².

Negotiating New Refuge: Family Solidarities and National Identities

The archives of the BCP's Central Committee contain a large collection of letters addressed by "*Greek political emigrants*" residing in East European communist countries and willing to settle in Bulgaria. This archival corpus of applications has still not been subject of serious historical or anthropologic analysis. According to contemporary Macedonian historians like Kirjazovski, in the case of Slav-speaking Aegean Macedonian refugees, these demands are the result of a "*Bulgarian propaganda*", of the wish of emigrants to get closer to their homeland or of health problems with climate conditions in some countries like Poland or Czechoslovakia. For a Bulgarian historian like Daskalov, these letters witness, on the contrary, the never-dying "*Bulgarian patriotism*" of the "*Macedonian Bulgarians*" from Aegean Macedonia. Far from these national-ideological constructions, the letters of Slav-speaking refugees addressed to the Bulgarian state and Party leadership indicate *a choice*, which was however to a large extent not political or strictly "national". One aspect – systematically omitted by both contemporary Macedonian and Bulgarian scholars – seems to have been decisive, namely the old *family solidarities* existing between Greek Civil war refugees and participants in previous migration waves from Macedonia who resided in Bulgaria.

⁵¹ According to oral information of the chairman of the Association of Child-Refugees (*Združenie na decatabelganci*) Gjorgji Donevski, and to interviews with some former political emigrants residing in Bulgaria.

⁵² For instance, the folk-singer Ljubka Rondova and the linguist Blagoj Klifov, both of them born in Kastoria/Kostur area. The first big Bulgarian-Macedonian scandal with the participation of Klifov seems to be the Bulgarian-Macedonian controversy during the World Slavist Congress in Prague (August 1968). Klifov is known mostly for his detailed study of his native Kastoria/Kostur Slavic dialect. As a "child-refugee", Klifov was educated in Hungary where he later contacted the Bulgarian ambassador Krâstju Stojev. According to Klifov's sayings, the ambassador "oriented" him "correctly" on the problems concerning the "Macedonian question". Thanks to the Slavic Committee, he migrated to Bulgaria in 1964, and in 1970 he was accepted as a member of both the Institute for Bulgarian Language of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and of the BCP (CPA, F. 1, OP. 36, A.E. 1057).

In their letters, the political emigrants sometimes emphasized the geographical proximity of Bulgaria to their places of origin, which actually shows their still existing project of return⁵³. The complaint of insufferable weather conditions is indeed frequently present in the applications⁵⁴. However, in the case of Slav-speakers, there are additional arguments to choose Bulgaria as a temporary or final refuge. Quite frequent reason for willing to settle in Bulgaria is the combination of weather conditions in their place of residence on the one hand, and the presence of family links with people in different places in Bulgaria, on the other⁵⁵. In general, almost all Macedonian refugees emphasized they had relatives in Sofia or in other places in the country⁵⁶. Often, the reason for their desire to settle in Bulgaria seems univocally formulated – “to join our people (*da si dojdime pri na_ite luge*)”⁵⁷. Here, “our people” (*na_ite*) is however potentially open collectivity – it could be restrained to the next of kin (cousins, uncles, sometimes parents etc.) but sometimes it covers “the Bulgarians” in general. Thus, the letters addressed to the International relations bureau of the Bulgarian Communist Party’s leadership could be also a source for analysis concerning the experience of ethnicity and of its connection with the family solidarities characterizing the Aegean Macedonian refugees, at least until the end of the 1960s.

Almost all Slav-speakers, refugees from the Greek Civil war, who applied for a permission to settle in Bulgaria, declared their ethnic belonging (*narodnost* or *nacionalnost*) as undoubtedly “Macedonian”⁵⁸. Some of them still conserved the Greek communist denomination “Slavo-Macedonian” (*slavjano-makedonec*)⁵⁹. Formulas like “refugee from the Greek Macedonia with Macedonian nationality [=ethnic origin – *narodnost*] and Greek citizenship”⁶⁰ are quite frequent, while the standard self-declaration is maybe “Macedonian by nationality, Greek political emigrant”⁶¹. The bulk of applicants point out “Macedonian” undeniably as their ethnic identification, however the semantic contents of this term seem much broader and floating than the nowadays-Macedonian national identity. At the first place, it was still not exclusive vis-à-vis identifications like “Bulgarian” or simply “Slav”.

As a basic reason to apply for Bulgaria, the Aegean Macedonian refugees stated for instance the linguistic proximity and in some statements even blurred the possible distinction between Macedonian and Bulgarian language: “I know the language” (*eziko go znam*)⁶². A refugee residing in Czechoslovakia declared he had “no relatives there and not only relatives

⁵³ CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 469, L. 39 – Zijas Pantelis from Sni_eni/Kastanofito, Kostur/Kastoria area.

⁵⁴ For instance in CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 622, L. 1, 20-21, 25, 72, 80-81 etc.

⁵⁵ See for instance, CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 469, L. 35, 41.

⁵⁶ *Pars pro toto*, Sotir Dolev and Dimana Doleva from Zagori_ani/Vasilias residing in Romania – CPA, OP. 32, A.E. 503, L. 53-54.

⁵⁷ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 426, L. 45 – a demand from Kica Kirova who insists: “there are so many people who went to Bulgaria – children with mothers and fathers – and you do not allow a single mother with three orphans to come, while our father fought for us and for all the people (*narod*), he gave his life for the freedom and the independence (*slobodata i nezavisnosta*)”.

⁵⁸ This is the case of at least 9/10 of the letters addressed by Slav-speakers residing in East Europe. The applicants originate from different areas of Greek Macedonia but mostly from nowadays Kastoria prefecture. The demands show different levels of education and diverse linguistic characteristics. The overwhelming majority of candidates used various linguist mixtures of their native Aegean dialects, of standard Bulgarian as well as of the recently standardized Macedonian. The letters combine orthographic traits of both Bulgarian and standard Macedonian (they use for instance *J* together with *_* and *_*), in few cases there are also rudiments from the Bulgarian orthography before 1945 (*_* at the end of words finishing with consonant). About 1/10 of the applications of refugees in East Europe are written in almost faultless standard Bulgarian while the same degree of proximity to standard Macedonian is absent.

⁵⁹ Like Jani Ra_ov from the village of Smârde_/Kristallopigi, Kostur/Kastoria area – CPA, OP. 32, A.E. 503, L. 24.

⁶⁰ The case of Andreja Ilovski – CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 620, L. 14.

⁶¹ For instance, Nikolaj Na_ev – CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 1079, L. 22.

⁶² CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 622, L. 85.

but no Bulgarians or Macedonians with whom to speak my native tongue”⁶³. A former commander of brigade on Grammos mountain emphasized his “Macedonian nationality” in order to be granted the right to join his relatives in Bulgaria, where his children to learn “in our mother language – Bulgarian”⁶⁴. A women, who had lived in Albania, Poland and Hungary finally decided to ask for a refuge in Bulgaria because of “the extremely difficult for us language [the Hungarian – T.M.] and the huge number of relatives and friends who went earlier to Bulgaria”⁶⁵.

Besides the language, the distinction between “Bulgarian” and “Macedonian” often does not exist on the symbolic level of “blood” and “roots”: Eleftheria Paschou from Kastoria area stated, “our origin from there is Bulgarian one – Macedonian”⁶⁶. For some of the refugees, both identifications are to be relegated to merely “Slavic” origin: a “Macedonian from Aegean Macedonia” wanted to settle in “what we call in Macedonian our mother Bulgaria”, where “to live with our Slavic people”⁶⁷. Petre Bogdanov from _elevo/Andartiko, Lerin/Florina area, residing in Legnica, Poland, declared his Macedonian nationality insisting that it is much more natural the “Macedonian” political emigrants and not the “Greek” ones to be allowed to live in Bulgaria⁶⁸. In some cases, they defined their ethnicity as “Macedonian-Bulgarian” (*makedonec-bългарin*)⁶⁹. In other, the difference between “Bulgarian” and “Macedonian” is seen as a phenomenon of different generations: the political emigrant Mihal Kotenovski declared “I am Macedonian from Aegean Macedonia. My grandparents had a Bulgarian nationality (nacionalnost)”⁷⁰. Even a former leader of the Macedonian pro-Yugoslav National-Liberation Front (NOF) like German Petrov Damovski stated his ethnicity and language as “Macedonian” while being among the “Bulgarians” who participated in the “national-liberation movement” in Macedonia⁷¹.

Of course, these documents are hardly to be analyzed as innocent statements of identity. The applicants certainly experienced the impact of Bulgarian identity politics, which – since the end of the 1950s – turned back to Bulgarian “patriotic” stance. However, if these letters are to be taken seriously and not as the outcome of a mere opportunism, they witness certain stage of ethnicity among Slav-speakers from Northern Greece that followed not only the intrusion of Bulgarian but also of Greek Communist Party’s and Yugoslav-Macedonian identity politics. The intermingling of both Yugoslav (Macedonian) and Bulgarian politics is maybe to be perceived in the demand of 15 families from Kostur/Kastoria area (mostly from the village of Smârde_/Kristallopigi⁷²), which in 1956 stated their willingness to settle in

⁶³ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 612, L. 49.

⁶⁴ CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 729, L. 17 – Vangel Dimitrov Demerd_iev from “*Aegean Macedonia, Lerin area*”.

⁶⁵ Tomaj Naumova Andreeva – CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 620, L. 5-6.

⁶⁶ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 623, L. 88.

⁶⁷ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 622, L. 109. The editor of the Macedonian pages of the Poland-based Greek political emigrants’ newspaper *Dimokratis* Vasil_amanovski had similar statement - CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 469, L. 35. Countries of residence like Poland and Czechoslovakia are obviously not identified with “Slavic”.

⁶⁸ CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 469, L. 31.

⁶⁹ CPA, F. 1, OP. 51, A.E. 580, L. 16. See also the letters of Alekso Spirov Vasilevski from the village of Gra_dino, “*Prespa area*”, living in Legnica, Poland (CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 622); Vangel Penev from Kumani_ovo/Lithia, Kostur/Kastoria area (CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 626, L. 7) etc. Georgi Daskalov analyses these examples from a Bulgarian mainstream historiographic point of view (Daskalov 1996: 292-295, 300-303, 310-312).

⁷⁰ “*Sum makedonec ot Egejska Makedonija. Starite moi dedove po nacionalnost beha Bugari*” – CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 622, L. 50.

⁷¹ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 804 – an account of German Damovski, dated 30/01/1957. Damovski was previously repressed in Bulgaria as “*Tito’s agent*” and, until 1954, he was imprisoned in the camp of Belene.

⁷² Example of incongruence of Macedonian and Greek mappings of region: according to the Macedonian symbolic mapping, Smârde_ is in Kostur/Kastoria area but, according to the Greek administrative division, Kristallopigi is situated in today’s Florina department.

Bulgaria – but more concretely – in “*Pirin Macedonia*”, where “*to learn our mother tongue, culture and traditions*”⁷³.

On the other hand, even in the beginning of the 1960s, the importance of Bulgarian propagandist “struggle” for the allegiance of Aegean Macedonian refugees is not to be overstated. The “*reunification of the families*”, started in 1953, concerned only parents separated from their minor children and divided spouses. This restriction provoked a bitter frustration among Greek and Macedonian refugees who attempted to draw to Bulgaria other close relatives like brothers and sisters, cousins, uncles, or children of theirs who had already achieved their maturity. Even if the first exceptions from this rule date back already to 1954⁷⁴, in the greater part of cases, such applications received an official rejection by the Party’s authorities. In the 1950s, even the cases of refugees declaring “*Bulgarian origin*” as a major reason for choosing Bulgaria as a country of residence are discarded with the reason that only reunifications of spouses or of parents with minor children are permitted⁷⁵. Due to bureaucratic reasons, sometimes one of the spouses was given access to Bulgaria while the other’s request was rejected⁷⁶. Parents with advanced illness are frequently refused “*last meeting*” with their children as the latter had attained their age of majority⁷⁷.

In the bulk of cases it was both the refugees in other East European countries and their relatives in Bulgaria who solicited the institutions to allow their immigration into Bulgaria⁷⁸. In such applications, the demand is full of historical details about the political involvement of the family (personal participation in the World War II or in the Civil war, father or brothers killed in it) and sometimes of quite standard scenes from the fear suffered in “*monarch-fascist*” Greece⁷⁹. Most of the refugees tried to back their demands with rich autobiographical accounts of their fights against the “*Greek monarch-fascists*”, of extraditions and years spent in prisons. Some of the family narratives addressed to the Bulgarian state emphasize on the historical continuity of the revolutionary fights in which members of the family were implied: Macedonian revolutionaries in the beginning of the 20th century killed by “*the Turks*”, ELAS partisans during the Hitlerist occupation, combatants from the Democratic Army of Greece during the Civil war who also participated in Vitsi and Grammos battles⁸⁰. Some of the

⁷³ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 622, L. 76.

⁷⁴ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 426, L. 20.

⁷⁵ Like the one of Jani Argirov from upani_ta/Ano Lefki, Kostur/Kastoria area (CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 622, L. 103) who declared “*nationality – Bulgarian*” (“*narodnos – Bâlgarin*”). Vasil Korove_ov from Smârde_/Kristallopigi, living in Uzbekistan, also received negative answer though he declared Bulgaria as a “*motherland*” – CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 623, L. 125-126. See also the case of Mihail Ra_ev from the village of Zeleni_e/Sklithro, Lerin/Florina area, who, in 1944, left his village for Bulgaria, while his wife and daughter were mobilized in the DAG. By the moment of his application, his wife resided in Poland, his daughter in Uzbekistan, while another daughter of his lived in Romania, and his son – in Yugoslavia (CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 503, L. 79).

⁷⁶ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 800, L. 74, 82, 91, 129.

⁷⁷ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 800, L. 107-108.

⁷⁸ Already in 1961, Ta_o Vasilev Miovski, living in Sofia, addressed a demand for his mother and younger brother residing in Hradec Kralové, Czechoslovakia – the demand was rejected (CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 729, L. 3). In 1963, another letter was addressed by his mother Dana Miovska herself (CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 1375, L. 9-10), but still without positive answer. It was only after the demand of Mita Miovska, sister of Ta_o and daughter of Dana, living in umen, Northeast Bulgaria, that their mother and brother Leko were allowed to come to Bulgaria (CPA, *Ibid.*, L. 25-26).

⁷⁹ In a demand for the resettlement in Bulgaria of her mother, Mita Miovska from Kosinec/Ieropigi stated that “*my mother was not able to speak Greek and the gendarmes were every evening under our windows to listen what language she would speak*” (CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 1375, L. 25).

⁸⁰ Some of them even participated in the so-called “*First Aegean Macedonian brigade*” which, in the beginning of 1945, was active in West Yugoslav Macedonia – an account of Kosta and Angel Levandov from Bobi_ta/Vergas and of Argir Vâl_ev from Bâmboki/Makrochori, Kastoria area (CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 803, L. 39-40, 42).

Macedonian refugees, especially those from Kostur/Kastoria area, attempted to exploit historical references to a rather important figure like Dimitâr Blagoev – the founder of the first Bulgarian Marxist party who – “like them” – originated from “*Aegean Macedonia*”, actually, from the Kastorian village of Zagori_ani/Vasilias. Hristo _magranov from Dâmbeni/Dendrochori launched his challenge: “*I would like to know if a political emigrant, a compatriot of father Blagoev, would be denied the right of refuge in Bulgaria*”, while another refugee stated his certitude that “*the glorious Party of Blagoev and Dimitrov*” would not reject his demand⁸¹.

The individual *life story* is in the majority of letters inscribed in the narrative of the big *national history* while the personal experience has a direct historical and political meaning. That is why, many of the refugees considered worth of description their quite sinuous biographical trajectories. For instance, a “Macedonian” originating from a village in Drama area came to Bulgaria already at the end of 1944, following the withdrawal of the Bulgarian army. He joined the latter as a volunteer and, after the end of the war, remained in Bulgaria’s region of Pirin Macedonia. In 1945, he was transferred with all of his family to Yugoslavia, where he lived in the republic of Macedonia. He was later mobilized by the Democratic Army of Greece and participated in the Civil war. Since 1949, he lived in Uzbekistan while his family in Yugoslavia. His final choice was to establish himself with his wife in Bulgaria where he had relatives⁸². Some of the refugees also had previously been season workers (*pe_albari, gurbet_ii*) overseas, mostly in the U.S.A., and they were caught up in the World War II and in the Civil war after they returned to Greece⁸³.

In many cases, the reason “*I have my people (svoi ljude) in Bulgaria*” is contrasted to the possibility to settle in Yugoslavia where, on the contrary, the applicants had reportedly no relatives⁸⁴. In most of the cases, the relatives in Bulgaria had already “*prepared the room*” (*ni imat prigotveno stajata*) in their homes for their next of kin and had provided other help until the latter were employed (*ke ni spomognat do koga ke fatime rabota*)⁸⁵. Quite often, the family solidarities were in sharp contradiction to the bureaucratic logic of administration and the demanders – either residents in East European countries or their relatives in Bulgaria – provided additional explanations. A woman, who insisted her nephew to be allowed to come from Poland, argued: “*For me, he is not a distant relative, neither am I for him. We have always felt him as a inseparable member of our family*”⁸⁶. This kind of demands was generally discarded by the Party authorities. In some letters, idyllic pictures of family life are opposed the harsh isolation from close relatives: “*like the eagle who scatters small chicken, in the same way we fled from the hands of our mother*”⁸⁷. Exile is thus experienced not so much as “extrication” from “homeland”, but rather as a disconnection from the next of kin. Bulgarian citizens asked for the immigration of their relatives with supplementary reasons like the absence of other family members in order to leave them in heritage a house or other

⁸¹ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 624, L. 34-35, 37.

⁸² The letter of Ne_o Ne_ev – CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 503, L. 69. Similar trajectories have number of Slav-speakers from East Greek Macedonia – see also CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 620, L. 46. People from Serres-Drama region who had obtained Bulgarian citizenship during the Second World war were transferred in 1945 to Yugoslavia, where they were subsequently mobilized in the Democratic Army of Greece – see the case of Dimitâr Had_istojanov in CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 623, L. 143-144.

⁸³ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 620, L. 40-42 – Hristo Andreevski from Dâmbeni/Dendrochori, “*Aegean Macedonia*”.

⁸⁴ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 622, L. 98-99.

⁸⁵ A demand signed by Teodora and Kostas Kumanovalis from Drama and Serres region, living in Tashkent, with relatives in Plovdiv – CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 800, L. 74.

⁸⁶ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 503, L. 22.

⁸⁷ Mita Miovska for her mother: “*kato orelo kogato digni pilkite taka i nie izbegame odracite na maika*” (CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 1375, L. 25).

property⁸⁸. The moment of reunification was felt especially urgent when somebody of the relatives was in an advanced age (*na stari godini*).

Even in the case of “national-based” reasons for choosing Bulgaria, the choice seems also to a large extent a function of presence of relatives from previous migrations to Bulgaria or of the possibility of reunification of the family in this country. The option to settle in Yugoslavia is indeed sometimes explicitly rejected by the applicants⁸⁹, while some of them even came from Yugoslavia where, after Tito-Stalin split, they were imprisoned as Informbureau or “*Bulgarian agents*”⁹⁰. But even individuals who declared Bulgarian ethnic identity were ready to move to Yugoslav Macedonia in the case their family was denied access to Bulgaria⁹¹. The possibility to be established in Yugoslavia was also used by the refugees in order to make the Bulgarian institutions accelerate the reunification of family. For instance, Hristo Tambovski, already residing in Bulgaria, stated the will of his parents from Czechoslovakia to come to live with him, warning that, otherwise, all the family would be obliged to move to Yugoslavia⁹². Following number of changes of country of residence, many families remained divided in two, after a part of the family members migrated to Yugoslav Macedonia, while another part – to Bulgaria⁹³. That is why, in some cases, when a direct migration to the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia was not possible, refugees opted for Bulgaria mostly because of its geographical proximity to the latter and, respectively, to their next of kin⁹⁴.

This set of possibilities and the diverse choices Slav-speaking refugees from Greek Civil war made, is another reason for such a lecture of their personal life stories that would be able to take into account quite complex and often divergent ways in which their family solidarities, political involvement and national identities were blended. Hence, instead of essentializing some general “*refugee experience*” of theirs, the biographies of these people should rather be taken in their multiplicity of possible and real trajectories and not necessarily as a result of a “*traumatic uprooting*” or a detachment from the “*natural homeland*”.

Archives

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CDA (Centralen Dâr_aven Arhiv) – Sofia: F. 141 (Slavjanski Komitet v Bâlgarija); F. 299 (Sâjuz na Makedonskite Kulturno-Prosvetni Dru_estva);

NA-BAN (Nau_en Arhiv – Bâlgarska Akademija na Naukite) – Sofia: F. 88 (Institut po Istorija na BAN).

⁸⁸ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 800, L. 62: Vasilka Filipova for her grandson Petros Theodorou “*from Aegean Macedonia*”, residing in the USSR. Some Aegean Macedonians had even family properties (houses) in Bulgaria, left by relatives who had migrated to Bulgaria during the interwar period – see CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 624, L. 20.

⁸⁹ CPA, F. 1, OP. 51, A.E. 576 – Agisilaos Galbov from Hrupi_ta/Argos Orestiko; CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 1066 – Metodi Duev from “*Greek Macedonia*”.

⁹⁰ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 792, L. 66 – Georgi Andonovski from Kâr_i_ta/Polianemo, Kostur/Kastoria area; CDA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 803, L. 42 – Argir Vâl_ev from Bâmboki/Makrochori, Kostur/Kastoria area. CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 1079, L. 10 – Georgi Georgiev from the village of Plevnja/Petroussa, Drama area.

⁹¹ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 1066 – This is the case of Argir Vâl_ev, otherwise expelled from Yugoslavia as “*Bulgarian agent*”. His family still remained in Skopje.

⁹² CPA, F. 1, OP. 33, A.E. 731, L. 11, L. 27 – the demand is however rejected.

⁹³ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 620, L. 23.

⁹⁴ CPA, F. 1, OP. 32, A.E. 620, L. 38.

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