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# **We, the People**

## Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe

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## TCHAVDAR MARINOV

### WE, THE MACEDONIANS

*The Paths of Macedonian Supra-Nationalism*  
(1878–1912)

#### 1. NATIONHOOD IN OTTOMAN MACEDONIA REFRAMED

The present paper sheds light on the most important patterns of Macedonian political emancipation, from the period subsequent to the Congress of Berlin (1878) and prior to the Balkan wars (1912–1913). It focuses on a number of problems addressed by this volume: different modalities of nationalism (supranational, inter-national, etc.); paradigm shifts of national discourses; the relationship between confessional and national identities, and between ethnicity and different political ideologies (liberal, socialist). The timeframe is by no means arbitrarily chosen: while the so-called "Macedonian Question" was generally perceived, already in this period, as a result of a political setting provoked by the decisions taken in Berlin, the context that followed the first division of the region brought about different political commitments deserving further special attention and survey.

It should be also noticed that, although "Macedonia" did not constitute a geographical or administrative entity in the framework of the Ottoman Empire, quite soon after 1878, diverse mappings projected this designation over parts of three administrative units – *vilayets* – inhabited by various populations. The Muslims (classified as "Turks," "Albanians," "Muslim Slavs," "Gypsies," etc.) cohabited with Jews (mostly in Salonica) and with Christians, amongst whom there were "Greeks," "Vlachs," "Slavs" and others. The "identity" of the Slavic population,<sup>1</sup> often seen as the largest linguistic "group," was nevertheless far from being a single one: it included "Greeks" or "Slav-/Bulgarian-

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1 The terms "Slavic population" and "Slavs" are used here as a reference to people speaking a certain vernacular tongue without predilection for their ethnic or national allegiances. However, one should take into account the fact that this was not an indigenous self-designation even if it was used by certain local intellectuals, mostly in the 19th century.

speaking Greeks"; "Bulgarians"; and "Serbs" (the "Macedonian Slavs" having also their place on certain mappings by the end of the 19th century).

These were the categorizations applied by Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian patriotic scholars during the period in question. But, today, the Bulgarian and the Macedonian historiographies are still struggling for the "right" definition of identity for the local Slavs: "Macedonian Bulgarians," according to the scholars from Sofia, or "ethnic Macedonians," according to those from Skopje. At the same time, most studies on Macedonia made by authors outside the Balkan region tend to present in a somewhat ironical way the mutually exclusive statistics of "nationalities" made by Balkan scholars cum propagandists.

Ottoman Macedonia is often depicted as absolutely lacking any proper idea of ethnicity, or as a terrible mixture sarcastically called *salade macédoine*.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, it is believed that the Macedonian Slavs had "no clearly developed sense of national identity" and that their modes of self-identification were shaped by neighboring Churches (the Constantinople Patriarchate rivaling with the Bulgarian Exarchate), schools and armed bands (Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek).<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, the "ethnic" categories were blurred, or represented just a function of social or professional status: the "Greeks" being the urban people, the "Bulgarians" – peasants, the "Vlachs" – transhumant shepherds, etc.<sup>4</sup> That is why the properly ethnic divisions that caused all the bloodshed in Macedonia in the beginning of the 20th century were themselves imposed by "outside" actors<sup>5</sup>. The commitment of members of the local Slavic population to the causes of Greek, Bulgarian or Serbian nationalism is seen as a result of a mere "propaganda."

Despite being a good counterweight to nationalist historiographic constructions like the Bulgarian one, this approach nevertheless implies *a double essentialism*. Firstly, in a typical reifying manner, it presumes the existence of some "genuine" or "proper sense of national identity" that all the members of a certain well-bound collectivity or "group" are equally, absolutely and constantly aware of. Such an "identity" is supposed to guide their everyday agency in some fundamental way. This was apparently not the case of turn-of-the-20th-century Macedonia, but is implicitly deemed to hold true for somewhere else. Secondly, this thesis tends to indirectly essentialize what is seen as the "a-national" character of Macedonian Slavs: ironically, the lack of national identity could also be a kind of identity and it is not by chance that the thesis of the "floating mass" of Macedonian Slavs is often used by

2 Duncan Perry suggests that today this "phrase coined a century ago to characterize the complex demographic makeup of Macedonia [...] is no less apt" – Perry (1988), p. 24.

3 Danforth (1995), p. 59.

4 This vision was already being promoted in the beginning of the 20th century by authors like Brailsford (1906) and Ancel (1930). A more nuanced version of the same vision, focusing on the social aspects of choosing between ethnic and national "identities" in the late 19th- and early 20th-century Macedonia, can be found in Gounaris (1996).

5 Danforth (1995), p. 60. Cf. Karakasidou (1997).

the Macedonian national historiography in order to assert a distinct "ethnic character." In this sense, the "a-national" theory is connected to what Ulf Brunnbauer labels as the historiographic "myth of victimization":<sup>6</sup> poor and naïve Macedonian Slavs were split and opposed to each other by "voracious" neighbors. Moreover, this vision inculcates a certain diagnosis of political infantilism onto the Macedonian population, essentialized as *a priori* belated, immature and far less national than the one of Serbia, Greece or Bulgaria prior to their "liberations" from Ottoman rule.

However, from another perspective, Macedonia's population from the turn-of-the-20th-century may seem – quite on the contrary – rather *national* or relatively well "nationalized," involved in diverse political agenda and even developing its one. Of course, the very concept of a "Macedonian population" should be nuanced. If the large peasant majority was in most of the cases undoubtedly far from the univocal categories of "national identity," the same does not hold true for its intelligentsia or "elite." It would be both unfair and, from a historical point of view, incorrect to pathologize the local nationalist intelligentsias as a deplorable outcome of foreign "propagandas." In 19th-century Macedonia, manifestations of Greek and Bulgarian nationalism preceded the moment of active political propaganda and, in the case of Bulgarian self-identification, even the establishment of the national Church (1870) and state (1878). This fact does not imply that these nationalisms represented a "natural" manifestation of millenary historical continuity as the local national historiographies assume. But nor does this mean that, in the Macedonian context, such manifestations were somewhat more "artificial" and "provoked from the outside" than the ones of other Balkan contexts.

Although it is beyond doubt that 19th-century Macedonia did not have powerful Slavic or other nationalist intelligentsias, around the turn-of-the-20th-century, their social stratum was hardly much thinner than ones in other Balkan countries prior to their achievement of national statehood. The first statistics concerning the literacy in Bulgaria after 1878 show catastrophic data (about 3–4% of the population were literate) that are scarcely better than the situation in the 1910s in Macedonia where the sharp Pan-Balkan competition in opening schools for the local Christian population only enlarged the spread of education. The network of, for example, Bulgarian schools in pre-1912 Macedonia was quite comparable to the one within would-be Bulgaria before 1878. The number of social and cultural transformations are also to be taken into account. Such a powerful innovation as the electric telegraph was unknown both to the Empire and to Serbs and Greeks in the moment of their struggles for independence in the beginning of the 19th century. Ottoman provinces in Macedonia were crossed by several railroads inexistent in Greece and Serbia before they attained the status of nation-states. And there were

6 Brunnbauer (2004), pp. 186–190.

also socialists, trade union movement activists, anarchists and quite modern terrorists – political currents and phenomena that make in many respects incommensurable the situation of the turn-of-the-20th-century Ottoman and Macedonian context with the moment of Serbian and Greek "revolutions." As far as the extent of national agitation is concerned, the anti-Ottoman *ilinden* uprising in 1903 demonstrated a larger scope than Bulgaria's April insurrection in 1876 (which encompassed a broader territory and a longer period of action, more participants, etc.), even though it did not take place only in Macedonia.

That is why the talk of particularly "a-national" Macedonian populations and, in particular, Macedonian Slavs is seriously misleading. Firstly, it does not show a difference between peasants and intelligentsia and accepts the quite problematic thesis that the peasant majority in other parts of the Balkans was somewhat more "awake" and nationally oriented. Secondly, it is used to implicitly promote certain kinds of nationalist vision. Namely, the origin of the "a-national" thesis could be itself traced back to the propagandist strategy deployed by the eminent geographer Jovan Cvijic who conspicuously put the Macedonian Slavic *masse flottante* to the south of cities like Skopje and Prilep which had been claimed by Serbian national romanticism.<sup>7</sup> Thirdly, this concept is overloaded with the essentialism of the "genuine national identity" as well as with a certain balkanist vision which deems that "Balkan nationalism" is *a priori* belated, "artificial," etc.

Phenomenon such as the Macedonian peasants' lack of concern for any national commitment was definitely not invented by the scholars. Instead, it happened to be so famous, and to such a large extent, because of the complicated international setting of the "Macedonian Question" that favored observers' interest towards the mentality of those people whose indifference in other geographical contexts passed unnoticed.<sup>8</sup> The same holds true also for the famous mixed character of Macedonia, which did not differ much from other regions in East and Southeast Europe like the Banat and Vojvodina, Transylvania, Dobroudja, etc. Moreover, it would be quite unconvincing to assume that ethnic or national motives were never present in the agency of illiterate populations when illiterate or half-literate Macedonian Christians fought between themselves as "Greeks," "Bulgarians," "Serbs" and "Romanians": surely, it was not just a struggle between social or professional categories. Indeed, in many parts of Macedonia, the Christian villages switched a number of times between diverse national allegiances, but this was the result of a cruel clash between several nationalisms (Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian) that were also fervently implanted (if not predominantly) by local people.

7 Cf. Cvijic (1907).

8 Here, the title of Eugen Weber's classical study *Peasants into Frenchmen* is revealing enough. Before their incorporation into the Serbian nation-state, many of the "Serbs" in Kosovo did not have much developed national identity either: Malcolm (1998), p. 231.

Last but not least, local people developed patterns of a distinct Macedonian loyalty, which are discussed below. All this does not necessarily mean any particular pre-eminence of "ethnic" motives in the Macedonian revolutionary movement. The following analysis tries to show that the question of ethnicity was not necessarily of primal concern for the political activism developed within the local revolutionary movement by the turn of the 20th century. But Macedonian revolutionaries were by no means "a-national" either: based on certain nationalisms of the region, mostly on the Bulgarian one, their ideology was in many cases *supra-national*. At least in theory, it intended to bring together – under the common denominator of "Macedonian people" – members of different ethnic, confessional and national groups.

Contrary to the simplifications of modern national narratives, the present survey is inspired by Fredrick Barth's emphasis on the circumstantialist and interactionist character of ethnicity. It could make more understandable some of the paradoxes that seem difficult to resolve in the rigid framework of national historiographies.<sup>9</sup> Rogers Brubaker's insistence on ethnicity as a category of practice and cognition rather than as a matter of firmly set-up solid "groups"<sup>10</sup> goes one step further and may be as useful for the study of nationhood in Macedonia. The following argument attempts – indeed – to demonstrate the contingent and variably salient<sup>11</sup> character of those self-identifications, categorizations and political loyalties that the national historians take for granted. But, whatever paradoxical and unexpected vicissitudes may emerge from this multiplicity, both the fearsome essentialism of the always "floating" and "a-national" Macedonian Slavic identity and the implicit orientalism of the explosive *salade macédoine* should be left aside.

## **2. THE MACEDONIAN AUTONOMY: TOWARDS A SEPARATE POLITICAL LOYALTY**

Throughout the 1880s and the 1890s, within the Macedonian political organizations in Bulgaria and on Macedonian terrain, two general tendencies crystallized, opposed and competed with each other, but also intermingled and experienced mutual transmutation. This was, on the one hand, a scenario hardly successful from an international relations point of view: the unification of the whole region with the "liberated" Bulgarian Principality following the imagery of the "Greater Bulgaria" temporarily proclaimed by the famous San Stefano preliminary treaty. The alternative option seemed much more plausible and advocated the creation of an "autonomous Macedonia" within

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9 Earth (1969).

10 "Ethnicity without Groups" and "Beyond Identity" in Brubaker (2004).

11 According to the expression of Jane Cowan and Keith Brown in Cowan (2000), pp. 3, 8–11.

the Ottoman Empire: a scenario, which was partially facilitated by the 23rd article of the Treaty of Berlin. In general, the "autonomous" or "self-governing" status implied a special kind of Constitution of the region (an Organic law), a reorganization of *gendarmerie*, broader representation of the local non-Muslim population in it as well as in all the administration. In particular, this meant a nomination of a Christian governor general, similar to what happened in Crete or in short-lived East Rumelia.

But the idea of autonomy was not necessarily an autochthonous or "purely Macedonian" one. It must be stated that, in the 1880s, diverse political parties and milieus in the Bulgarian Principality promoted the idea of an "autonomous Macedonia" and sponsored political activity in this sense with a long-term aim at "national unification of Bulgarian people." According to one of the long-term projects that were developed by Macedonian militants, the autonomous status of the region may serve as a first step towards its eventual unification with Bulgaria.<sup>12</sup> This idea seemed a bit more plausible after the successful precedent of 1885 when, despite the provisions of Treaty of Berlin, East Rumelia was united with the Bulgarian Principality.

But another tendency within the Macedonian movement envisaged "autonomous Macedonia" as a basis for the creation of a Pan-Balkan (con)federation: in this case, the neighbors' territorial appetites would be permanently neutralized. The latter project crystallized in the late 1880s when the Bulgarian government sought to restrain the Macedonian militants in order to obtain certain privileges for the Bulgarian Church and national cause in the region through a political *rapprochement* with the Ottoman Empire. As a result, the Macedonian autonomism obtained an oppositional character and suggested a separate political allegiance based on *supra-national* categories of belonging.

A "draft" of this supra-national ideology is given in the anonymous article "An Opinion Concerning the Resolution of Macedonian Question" published in 1889 in the newspaper *Makedonija* [Macedonia], edited by the Ohrid native, Bulgarian provincial clerk and Macedonian activist Kosta Šahov.<sup>13</sup> Its author promotes the idea of an independent struggle of the entire population of the region against Ottoman domination. For this task, he recommends the usage of the common denominator "Macedonians" [*makedonci*] for all the ethnic and confessional communities of the region. "We, the Macedonians" [*nie makedoncite*], stresses the anonymous activist, should not desire any unification with a neighbor state whatsoever, as the other neighbors would also try to get their share and Macedonia would be torn up. Regardless of their "nationality" [*národnost*] – be they "Bulgarians, Turks, Vlachs, etc." – all Macedonians have "the same interests" and should work for the "political liberty" of their "land."

12 Cf. Božinov, *étal.*, (1979), p. 662.

13 "Mnenie za rešavanje Makedonskija vâpros", *Makedonija*, (August 19, 1889).

The autonomist agenda was given a new impetus after 1893 when six activists founded in Salonica the famous Macedonian revolutionary organization referred to quite often as the "Internal organization." After a few years, it became an important internal and even international political factor of the "Macedonian Question," while in the long term it was transformed into one of the basic "myths" claimed both by Bulgarian and modern Macedonian nationalism. However, the first official designation of this organization is still the object of historiographic controversies not only between Bulgarian and Macedonian historians, but also within the Macedonian historiography itself.

According to the Macedonian specialist Ivan Katardžiev, the organization first bore the name "Bulgarian Macedono-Adrianopolitan Revolutionary Committees" (BMORK) but, already by 1896, it had changed this designation in favor of "Secret Macedono-Adrianopolitan Revolutionary Organization" (TMORO).<sup>14</sup> For obvious reasons, most of today's Macedonian historians reject the authenticity of the first designation which – moreover – does not exist in the memoirs of the organization's founders. Referring to this fact as well as to other sources that confirm the Bulgarian ethnic restriction of the first statute of the organization,<sup>15</sup> the Bulgarian historians assume that the founding documents of the latter have still not been discovered and that the name BMORK dates back to 1896–1897.<sup>16</sup>

All these debates are not so inconsequential as, for the Bulgarian and for Macedonian historians, what is at stake for this case is to know *when* exactly the organization had abandoned its "narrowly Bulgarian" character. The TMORO statute is clearly supra-national and grants the right of membership to every "Macedonian or Adrianopolitan." The statute appeals for the unification of all the "unsatisfied elements," both in Macedonia and in the region of Adrianople, regardless of their "nationality" [*národnost*]. The general political objective is declared as a "revolution" presumed to achieve the "complete political autonomy" of the two regions.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, this autonomist ideology was by no means sophisticated. As the Bulgarian historian Kostadin Palešutski emphasizes, in the language of the Internal organization, the terms "political autonomy," "complete political autonomy" and "liberty" represented "abstract concepts" that were in diverse documents used in an interchangeable way.<sup>18</sup> In general, there was not a coherent political theory behind the organization's supra-nationalism. The Bulgarian historians would emphasize likewise that there was not a clear idea of separate statehood behind these slogans either. The organization was largely dependent on the Bulgarian state and army assistance that was mediated by

14 Katardžiev (1961), pp. 156, 162. This version is similarly accepted by Pandevski (1974).

15 Cf. Siljanov(1933), p. 40.

16 Pandev (2000), pp. 140–141.

17 Andonov-Poljanski, *etal*, (1985), pp. 360–362.

18 Palešutski (1983), p. 289.

some of the future champions of Macedonian autonomism like Goce Delčev and Gjorče Petrov. The "Adrianopolitan" part of the organization's name indicates that its agenda concerned not only Macedonia but also the Adriano-ple (Edirne/Odrin) *vilayet* in Thrace whose Bulgarian population is by no means claimed by modern Macedonian nationalism.

Nevertheless, the political emancipation of the Internal organization was catalyzed soon after its creation as a result of certain conflicts between the local "elite" of Bulgarian Church "communes" in Macedonia and the ecclesiastic authorities of the Bulgarian Exarchate that tried to centralize the organization of Church matters, the local school system as well as the nomination of commune chiefs. The organization decisively took the side of local communes and advocated their self-governance. In 1894, one of the revolutionary leaders – Petâr Poparsov – edited, on behalf of the organization, a brochure<sup>19</sup> where he expressed quite a sharp criticism towards the "authoritarian" and "corrupted" course of action of the Bulgarian Church in the region. The Exarchate was directly accused of a dictatorial suppression of the deliberative "liberties" of the local population. At the same time, the clerks of the Exarchate opposed the revolutionary agenda of the organization, the latter being seen as adventurous and harmful to the process of national integration. The Bulgarian Exarch Josif himself considered that the revolutionaries would only complicate the political status quo and hinder the formation of a powerful Bulgarian intelligentsia in Macedonia.

Moreover, violent conflicts followed between the activists of the organization and those who were loyal to the Exarchate. The latter were provoked, according to the Bulgarian historiography, by the differences in their tactics with regard to the idea of "liberation" from the Ottoman regime: revolutionary and based on provoking of large-scale political tension and, respectively, evolutionist and centered on the cultural strengthening of the "Bulgarian nation" in Macedonia.<sup>20</sup> However, it is undoubtedly striking that one of the first armed conflicts of the Internal organization was with the followers of the Bulgarian Exarchist policy in the region. Referring to this fact, the Macedonian historiography interprets them in national terms as an "ethnic conflict" between "Macedonians" and "(pro-)Bulgarians." Some other specialists, by no means unilaterally pro-Macedonian in the modern national sense, also consider that these controversies and reciprocal murders indicate a kind of differentiation of a separate Macedonian identity.<sup>21</sup>

Still, this interpretation must face some problems: from its perspective, it is difficult to explain, for instance, the fact that the almost exclusive "national" basis of the organization was namely the Exarchist population. The same

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19 Vardarski (1894).

20 Cf. Siljanov (1933), pp. 119–128.

21 Adanir (2002), p. 146.

holds true for the clear domination of the Exarchist social elite within its leadership and of the practical support given to it by the local institutions of the Exarchate. Bulgarian teachers in Macedonia constituted the backbone of the Internal organization while, according to their social profile, its leaders were quite often themselves former Exarchist teachers.<sup>22</sup> Though their divergent and conflicting visions, the benevolent attitude of the organization towards the Exarchate as a "national" institution is expressed by as fervent autonomist as the revolutionary Gjorče Petrov.<sup>23</sup> The lack of diverse "ethnic" motivations seems to be confirmed by the fact that, in his brochure, Poparsov generally uses the designation "Bulgaro-Macedonians" and "Macedonian Bulgarians" in order to name his "compatriots."

All that comes to confirm the difficult translatability of these events in terms of "ethnic" conflict: the Macedonian revolutionaries actually sought to prevent the Bulgarian church authorities from any interference in what they saw as the *political* field, while the Exarchate had its "legitimate" place in the narrowly *national* development. And yet, the separation between "political" (Macedonian) and "national" (Bulgarian) loyalty was already outlined in the discourse of the Macedonian revolutionaries. It was even further confirmed in their armed conflict with another institution – this time an "external" one and established by Macedonian *émigrés* in Bulgaria.

In 1895, a number of diasporic political associations merged into a Sofia-based "Macedonian Committee" that was later named the "Supreme Macedonian" and "Supreme Macedono-Adrianopolitan Committee." In the dominant Macedonian historiographic vision, the Committee and its activists – the so-called "supremists" [*vrhovisti*] – are opposed to the "internals" or the "centralists" [*centralisti*] from the Internal organization and stigmatized as instruments of the "Greater-Bulgarian" policy of Sofia.

However, both the relations between the Bulgarian governments and the Committee, as well as relations between the latter and the Internal organizations seem more complex than that. Actually, the two centers of Macedonian activism initially cooperated, especially during the time when the Bulgarian army officer Boris Sarafov was in charge of the activists in Sofia. Ironically, even before the Internal organization, the first statute of the Supreme Committee declared as a general task of its activity the achieving of a "political autonomy" of Macedonia.<sup>24</sup> In the supremacist slogans, the long-term future of the autonomous administrative entity of Macedonia is often indeed not clear, but this lack of precision is by no means limited to the supremists.

22 Perry (1988), pp. 144–151, 182–183.

23 Božinov, *etal.*, (1979), p. 557.

24 Contrary to what, for example, the anthropologist Anastasia Karakasidou believes when she speaks of the very "different" agendas of "internals" and "externals", the latter promoting a "Greater-Bulgarian" solution to the "Macedonian Question": Karakasidou (1997), p. 100.

The relations between the organization and the Supreme Committee drastically deteriorated only about six years after the setting-up of Sofia's institution, especially around the ill-fated uprising in the region of Gorna Džumaja (today Blagoevgrad) incited in 1902 by the activists from Sofia and fiercely opposed by the internal ones. In the same year, activists of the Internal organization offered a more coherent declaration of its (supra-)national ideology.

### 3. THE POLITICAL SEPARATISM OF THE INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

In an article, "Political separatism,"<sup>25</sup> the revolutionaries promoted as a basic slogan William Gladstone's expression "Macedonia for the Macedonians" [*Makedonija za makedoncite*] held to express the principle of autonomy and of "political separatism." Already, the beginning of the text clearly states the meaning of these terms: it is a question of separation of Macedonia *vis-à-vis* "the idea of Greater Bulgaria, or Greater Serbia, or Greater Greece." The concrete stakes of this agenda are also explained: Macedonia is endangered by "greater or smaller states" and while the "small states of the Balkan peninsula" could not solve the Macedonian question, which is of "European importance," they only create conditions that would enable their territorial expansion and the partitioning of Macedonia. "Greeks" and "Serbs" are directly accused of such ambitions. However, the Bulgarian Principality is also condemned for "speculating" with the "unhappy Macedonia" in favor of its "ephemeral" political interests. Above and beyond the "harm" which the Balkan states are doing to the cause of "Macedonian freedom," the Macedonian population [*makedonskoto naselenie*] is considered to be biased towards an idea other than the "Greater Bulgaria" of San Stefano.

However, contrary to the impression of researchers who believe that the Internal organization espoused a "Macedonian national consciousness,"<sup>26</sup> the local revolutionaries declare their conviction that the "majority" of the Christian population of Macedonia is "Bulgarian." They clearly reject possible allegations of what they call "national separatism" *vis-a-vis* the Bulgarians and even consider it "immoral." Though they declare an equal attitude towards all the "Macedonian populations," the activists' tolerance has, however, at least one significant limit: they denounce particularly the pretensions of Serbia – who, according to the activists creates "proselytes" where she has no "compatriots."

25 "Političeski separatizâm", *Pravo*, (June 7, 1902). Edited by the Macedonian activists Nikola Naumov and Tomá Karajovov, the newspaper *Pravo [The Right]* was the unofficial tribune of the Internal organization. Cf. Božinov, *et al.*, (1979), pp. 456–459.

26 Karakasidou (1997), p. 100.

The text suggests that the integrity of the region implies the "conservation" of the "national unity of the Bulgarian tribe" (*bâlgarskoto pleme* – a term having also a positive meaning in Bulgarian). Paradoxically, through the realization of autonomous Macedonia, it is deemed to remain whole and united through its "spiritual culture," even though politically divided. The other options entail the risk that a part of the "Bulgarian tribe" falls under Greek, Serbian or other domination. Nevertheless, by the very abandoning of the Bulgarian united nation-state project, the article attempts to trace a kind of distinct supra-national ideology based on modern liberal principles. Considering themselves "protagonists of liberty and culture," the activists of the Internal organization oppose what they call "denationalization" not only of their own but also of other "peoples" [*narodŭ*]. The article also gives long-term aspects of Macedonian autonomy that has at stake the "higher idea" of an eventual establishment of a "Balkan confederation."

However, some basic ambiguities should be taken into account: for instance, the "guarantee" for the preservation of other national communities stems from "the character of the Bulgarian tribe" that, according to Macedonian revolutionaries, could be "proud of its tolerance" in opposition to "Romanians, Serbs and Greeks." Hence, the administration of "autonomous Macedonia" will rely on a "tolerant" majority, thanks to which all the "Macedonian populations" would be united in "one political entity." In this manner, the activists of the Internal organization implicitly consider that the Bulgarians should represent a kind of "dominant nation" taking up the role of the "good master" that will generously manage to consolidate all other "populations," "nationalities," "minorities," "peoples" and "tribes" (these terms being more or less synonymous). Thus, on the one hand, the activists of the organization trace a principal distinction between "national" and "political" in the sense that the political ideal of common "prosperity" entails a supra-national compromise with the narrowly national, ethnic or confessional loyalties. But, considering the idea of the "special character" of "Bulgarians," one may be tempted to ask the question to what extent this was a "sincere" declaration of intentions.

According to the mainstream Bulgarian historiography, the idea of autonomy represented a pure "tactics" of the revolutionary movement in Macedonia and in Thrace aiming at the eventual unification with the Bulgarian state. Thus, according to some Bulgarian historians, the project of autonomy did not imply any separatism whatsoever, which maybe indicates that the same are either not acquainted, or intentionally neglect the article from 1902.<sup>27</sup> Yet, the text of the organization's activists suggests more or less that the "political separatism" is a contingent solution, imposed by international setting, as the Macedonians are apparently "conscious of the utter impossibility of realizing the idea of Greater Bulgaria." This may indeed leave the impression that

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27 Gocev (1983).

autonomy represents just "the plan B" of Bulgarian "unification." Moreover, since the article was simultaneously published in French, one must take into account the possibility of intentionally reinforced separatism for purely foreign propaganda reasons: as a rule, the Macedonian activists were adamantly trying to convince European public opinion that the Internal organization was by no means a Bulgarian political pawn even in the periods of close cooperation with Sofia.

However, many political events were capable to reinforce the supranational "Macedonian" aspect of Macedonian activists. In 1902, they were, for instance, scandalized when a Serbian bishop was finally nominated in the Patriarchist diocese of Skopje: the article states overtly the Macedonian revolutionaries' indignation from Belgrade but, through its presumed inactivity, the russophile Bulgarian government was likewise suspected of preparing a "brotherly" South-Slavic partition of Macedonia. Thus, ironically, the declaration of "political separatism" was at the same time an expression of Bulgarian ethnic self-identification. This basic ambiguity of political visions may only be acknowledged: undoubtedly, the Macedonian revolutionaries "dwelled much more on the process [...] rather than on the question of the precise political form" of autonomy.<sup>28</sup>

#### **4. PATTERNS OF ETHNICIZATION OF MACEDONIAN SUPRA-NATIONAL AUTONOMISM**

Despite this supra-national aspect of Macedonian "political" identity, one may easily find writings that bestow this identity also with certain "ethnic" or "cultural" contents. As a political tribune of "the Macedonians" in Bulgaria, *Makedonija* (later named *Glas makedonski* – [The Macedonian Voice]) published by the aforementioned Kosta Šahov asserted a fervent identification with the native land. The newspaper searched for a particular Macedonian historical tradition and promoted the images of ancient Macedonia and of Alexander the Great. The latter is even proclaimed by Šahov the "national pride of Macedonian people."<sup>29</sup>

This kind of "national" emancipation should not be, however, overestimated: it should be enough to say that, in 1895, Šahov addressed a telegram to the Russian count Ignatiev in order to congratulate him as the inventor of the Greater Bulgaria of San Stefano.<sup>30</sup> *Makedonija* newspaper not only regarded all the Macedonian Slavs like Bulgarians but even tried to convince its public

28 Perry (1988), p. 202.

29 *Makedonija*, (November 11, 1888, and March 17, 1889).

30 Burilkova, Biljarski (2003), p. 68.

that the same holds true for all the population of Serbia's South Morava region (Niš, Vranje, etc.).<sup>31</sup>

Similar is the case of a review published by the upcoming Macedonian revolutionaries whom Šahov collaborated with. Macedonian historiography often refers to the group of young activists (in particular, ex-students in Belgrade) who founded in Sofia an association called the "Young Macedonian Literary Society." In 1892, the latter began publishing the review *Loza* [The Vine] which promoted certain characteristics of Macedonian dialects. At the same time, the activists, called "Lozars" after the name of their review, "purified" the Bulgarian orthography from some rudiments of the Church Slavonic and brought it closer to Vuk Karadzic's Serbian phonetic script. They expressed likewise a kind of Macedonian patriotism attested already by the first issue of the review: its materials greatly emphasized identification with Macedonia as a genuine "fatherland." The editors of *Loza* also referred to the "ancient" dignity of their native region: Phillip of Macedón and Alexander the Great appear already on the fifth page of the first book of the review. All these elements were enough for the governmental press in Sofia to accuse the young Macedonian intellectuals of "separatism" and of possible pro-Serbian stance.

The Lozars did not delay in dispersing these accusations, and gave up their particular "reformed" language and orthography. Although they did not agree so enthusiastically with the character of standard Bulgarian language that was quite distant from Macedonian dialects, the editors of the review suggested that, according to their language, the Macedonians "may only be Bulgarians."<sup>32</sup> In any case, it is hardly surprising that the Lozars demonstrated both Bulgarian and Macedonian loyalty: what is more interesting is namely the fact that their Bulgarian nationalism was somehow harmonized with a Macedonian self-identification that was not only a political one but also demonstrated certain "cultural" contents (language traits, particular history and an emphasized particular geography of the "homeland"). The Lozars' case only confirms the Fredrick Earth's idea that the patterns of self-identification are to a large extent the contingent result of a specific interaction within a particular setting.

These activists had afterward different political careers: amongst them, one finds leaders of the Macedonian revolutionary movement (both from the Internal organization and the Supreme Committee), Bulgarian intellectuals and even one future prime minister of Bulgaria. Some of them undoubtedly retained their more pronounced local patriotism: for instance, Petâr Poparsov with his aforementioned brochure where he criticized the Exarchist policy.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the national discourse of some Macedonian revolutionaries may seem

31 *Makedonija*, (August 19, 1889).

32 Cf. *Loza* (1892), pp. 56, 58.

33 Andonov-Poljanski, *etal*, (1985), pp. 333–336.

to be marked by a *situational ethnization* in a Macedonian sense.

Such manifestations are to be found also in cases of leaders of the Supreme committee. The Bulgarian colonel and activist of the Committee Anastas Jankov mentions in his memoirs how, in an attempt to convince a Serbian captain for the need of Macedonian autonomy, he opposed the latter's assertions that a Macedonian Slavic "nationality" had never existed and gave as a historical proof the medieval state of Samuil.<sup>34</sup> According to some data, Boris Sarafov – both a supremacist and centralist – declared the Macedonians to be a distinct "national element."<sup>35</sup>

Two ideological currents – the socialists and the anarchists – went far in their demarcation from the mainstream Bulgarian nationalism. The idea of a self-governing Macedonia was emphasized in the very first program of the Macedonian socialists led by Vasil Glavinov and was made more explicit in their newspaper *Političeska svoboda* [The Political Liberty]. The newspaper severely criticized Bulgaria for its ambitions at territorial expansion in the region and appealed for the creation of an independent "federative Macedonian republic," conceived as a kind of "Balkan Switzerland." The latter presumed a cantonal organization of all local "national elements" that would have the possibility to choose the official language in the cantons where they constituted the ethnic majority.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, this independent Macedonian republic was supposed to have played the role of fundament of another one, broader federation – namely, the one of all the Balkan "peoples."

Yet, the socialists' emphasis on a separate political agenda of "Macedonian people" was based on class-ideological aspects which bestowed it with "a-national" aspects. The ambitions of what is labeled "a stupid chauvinism and patriotism" and especially of the "Bulgarian chauvinism" are opposed by the socialists to the idea that "the Macedonian" [*makedonecât*] has to realize, at the first place, "his" class-ideological tasks. That is why, according to *Političeska svoboda*, "the Macedonian" should by no means be regarded as a Bulgarian, Serb or Greek as "he" is, on the first place, a political "slave" [*rob*].<sup>37</sup> In some articles of the newspaper (as well as in party documents of the Macedonian socialist group) the term "Macedonian people" [*makedonski narod*] is contrasted with the "Bulgarian people" [*bâlgarski narod*]. For instance, according to one conspicuous expression, "the Bulgarians" are "close in every respect" to "the Macedonian people" which actually asserts the contrast between these two "national" categories.<sup>38</sup>

34 Burilkova, Biljarski (2003), p. 155.

35 See "The Macedonian Agitation", *The Times*, (April 12, 1901); "Nouvelles d'Orient", *Pro Armenia*, (April 25, 1901). Both newspapers refer to an interview with Sarafov for the Viennese newspaper *Die Information*.

36 *Političeska svoboda*, (February 6, 1898 and November 29, 1898), pp. 1–2.

37 *Političeska svoboda*, (April 19, 1899).

38 Cf. *Političeska svoboda*, (April 19, 1898), pp. 2, 5.

It would nevertheless be far-fetched to say that the "Bulgarian" character of Macedonian Slavs is completely rejected. For instance, *Političeska svoboda* opposed the Serbian idea that the Macedonians are a kind of Serbo-Bulgarian "paste" and asserted their "Bulgarian" belonging.<sup>39</sup> However, in the socialist rhetoric, this ethnic characteristic is definitively not discursively dominant. The political and class imperatives of "liberty" rather emphasized the distinct political tasks of the "Macedonian people," uniting – contrary to what is seen as "Bulgarian people" – not only "Bulgarians" but a number of other "nationalities." This terminological *imbroglio* makes the socialist "national" categories quite incommensurable with strict nationalistic Macedonian or Bulgarian concepts nowadays. Hence, while the Bulgarian historians sometimes condemn the "national nihilist" positions of Macedonian socialists, their Macedonian counterparts express frustration that the latter were not sufficiently "aware" of the distinct character of the Macedonian nation.<sup>40</sup>

But, paradoxically, the "a-national" "nihilistic" aspect could acquire, in some moments, a distinct national or ethnic meaning. Such an ethnicization of Macedonian identity is more visible in the marginal anarcho-socialist newspaper *Maleševski Balkan* [The Mountain of Maleševo] that appeared in 1897. In some articles like "At Least do not Hinder Us!," the newspaper treats the Macedonians as distinct from both Bulgarians and Serbs, these nations otherwise seen as the "closest to us."<sup>41</sup> However, neither in *Maleševski Balkan* did this Macedonian nationalism seem consistent, as the newspaper also offers articles claiming a Bulgarian identity for the Macedonian Slavs. This paradoxical fact may indicate that, by the turn of the 20th century, the patterns of ethnicization of Macedonian ideology in general remained firmly associated with a political agenda opposing in the first place the nation-states' aspirations, and did not claim so much a distinct "core" culture.

Such an impression seems confirmed by the mixture of strong internationalist, "a-national" and Macedonian "ethnic" aspects that is also to be found in the ideology of the Macedonian anarchist committee formed at the end of the 1890s by students in Geneva. The anarchists promoted likewise the idea of Macedonia for all the Macedonian "nationalities" and appealed for its complete independence. For this reason, the activists of the committee recommended a ruthless struggle not only against the Greek and Serbian ambitions but also against the "Bulgarian chauvinism" and its aspirations towards the "unification" of Bulgaria and Macedonia.<sup>42</sup>

One should nevertheless take into account the following paradox: the an-

39 *Političeska svoboda*, (March 29, 1898). The Macedonian socialists likewise advocated the liberation cause of the Adrianople vilayet.

40 Cf. Makedonski naučen institut (1995), pp. 280–281, 284.

41 Andonov-Poljanski, *et al.*, (1985), 364–366.

42 See the letters of Petăr Mandžukov and Slávi Merdžanov published in Andonov-Poljanski, *et al.*, (1985), pp. 372–375.

archist organization in Geneva included mostly militants who were natives from Bulgaria and not from Macedonia. The Macedonian historian Ristovski likewise emphasizes that their program of a "Macedonian state" comprised also the Adrianople Thrace, which actually "does not presume [the idea of] a distinct Macedonian national entity."<sup>43</sup> These aspects are undoubtedly difficult to explain from the point of view of Macedonian historiography, but they present a challenge for the Bulgarian one also. The fact that even people of "non-Macedonian descent" espoused a strong Macedonian identity shows a considerable degree of development of a distinct political loyalty, emancipated from the Pan-Bulgarian national project.

**5. ILINDEN AND AFTER:  
THE MACEDONIAN LEFT-WING AUTONOMISM  
AGAINST BULGARIAN "STATE NATIONALISM"**

Both the supra-national ideology of the Internal organization and the internationalist program of socialists are often thought to have been put into practice during the most important revolutionary event of turn-of-the-20th-century Macedonia – the anti-Ottoman Insurrection of ilinden (August 1903). According to traditional Bulgarian and Macedonian narratives, Kruševo in the *vilayet* of Manastir, a town inhabited by diverse Christian populations was transformed into an ephemeral "republic" with a temporary revolutionary authority where different "national elements" cooperated.<sup>44</sup> The famous "Kruševo Republic" was led by a local activist of the Internal organization with a socialist orientation – Nikola Karev – and was supposed to have incarnated the principle of supra-national equality.<sup>45</sup> With regard to the latter, the most emphasized moment seems to have been the elaboration of the so-called "Kruševo Manifesto" – a letter announcing the creation of "Autonomous Macedonia" that was addressed from the local militants to neighboring Muslim villages in order to convince them that revolutionary activities were not directed against the peaceful "Turkish" population but solely against the Sultan's "tyranny."<sup>46</sup>

However, the original of this manifesto has not been preserved: current Macedonian historiography refers to a text that was suggested about 20 years after by a Kruševo-born playwright. Regardless of whether such a document existed or not, the "Kruševo Republic," which survived only about ten days,

43 Ristovski (2001), p. 390.

44 On diverse narratives concerning the "Kruševo republic": Brown (2003).

45 Ristovski regrets the fact that the "government" of the "republic" (nowadays held to be a symbol of Macedonian statehood) was actually composed of two "Greeks", two "Bulgarians" and one "Romanian": cf. Ristovski (2001).

46 Andonov-Poljanski, et al., (1985), pp. 432–434.

was certainly far from being an "oasis" of inter-communitarian cohabitation. Greek sources attest an aggressive or provocative attitude of the insurgents towards the local "Greek" population while, despite the presumably "tolerant" attitude towards Muslim population, the rebels of ilinden attacked Muslim villages and numerous "Turkish" peasants became the victims of revolutionary terror. The cruel response of Ottoman authorities and the final catastrophe of the ill-fated uprising only increased the controversies existing within the Internal organization.

Two ideological wings, which had already been partially structured before the summer of 1903, finally took shape. Gjorče Petrov became the spokesman for the independentism of the organization with regard to the "nationalistic propagandas" of Balkan states, including Bulgaria. At the same time, other important activists like Dame Gruev were still inclined towards a close political cooperation with Sofia. While activists from the so-called "right wing" insisted on the reinforcement of what the latter called "national color" [*nacionalen kolorit*] of the organization, the "leftists" opposed the Bulgarian "nationalistic line" [*nacionalističeski kurs*].<sup>47</sup> According to them, a more pronounced Bulgarian stance could only be harmful to the supra-national ideals and incite a further internal division of the Macedonian population due to a similar intensification of Greek and Serbian "propagandas" in the region.<sup>48</sup>

The general Congress of the Internal organization in 1905 (the so-called "Rila Congress") turned the general political line decisively to the "left" by the adopting the main visions of the revolutionaries from the Serres department led by Jane Sandanski. The organization changed its name to VMORO ("Internal Macedono-Adrianopolitan Revolutionary Organization") and its statute reasserted the ideology of supra-nationalism: members of the organization could be "anybody" from "European Turkey" independently of his or her "sex, religion, nationality and conviction [*ubeždenie* – i.e., partisan orientation]." The statute specified that "The Organization opposes the aspirations for partition and conquest of these regions [Macedonia and Adrianopolitan Thrace] without regard for from what state they originate."<sup>49</sup> Quite indicative for the leftists' ideology seems also that the attitude formulated by the Rila Congress *vis-à-vis* the Bulgarian Exarchate: the organization declared its intention to counter the activities of the latter "that are led in the spirit of the Bulgarian state nationalism." The Bulgarian historian from the interwar period (and Macedonian activist) Hristo Siljanov and the Bulgarian specialists nowadays do not find a real explanation for the "anti-naturalness" and the "lack of any reason whatsoever" in such formulations. The activists of the revolutionary departments of Serres, Strumica and Salonica nonetheless

47 Siljanov (1943), pp. 67–68.

48 Cf. Adanir (2002), p. 213.

49 Siljanov (1943), pp. 393–394.

stipulated that the "Macedonian Question" could not be resolved if it was formulated as a part of a Bulgarian national question. In this manner, the policy of Sofia was completely identified with the adversary character of Athens and Belgrade: Bulgaria was clearly treated by the Serres activists as a "foreign, hostile force"<sup>50</sup> and Sandanski condemned what he called "Bulgarian imperialism." According to him, the Macedonians had to emancipate themselves as a "self-determining people."<sup>51</sup>

To what extent do all these declarations mean that, subsequent to the ilinden catastrophe in 1903, the supra-national program of Macedonian revolutionaries gave birth to a Macedonian nationalism? Macedonian mainstream specialists on the history of local revolutionary movement, such as Katardžiev, consider that the political separatism of Internal organization represented indeed a form of Macedonian nationalism<sup>52</sup>. However, the first problem before such an interpretation stems in particular from the "Macedono-Adrianopolitan" character of the Internal organization during its "classical" period, i.e., the one prior to the Balkan wars. The statutes and directives of the Central Committee as well as the other official documents of the organization (written in the Bulgarian language) concern not only the "Macedonian people" but also the "Adrianopolitans" or "the Adrianople people," i.e., the Bulgarians and (at least in theory) other "nationalities" inhabiting the *vilayet* of Adrianople. This fact, as well as the acceptance of Bulgarians from Bulgaria and from the Ottoman Thrace into the leading ranks of the Internal organization not only corroborates the fact that the Macedonian activists did not insist on any own "ethnic" peculiarity and difference with regard to the Bulgarians, but may also undermine the idea of a distinct national emancipation on a purely "political" basis.

Besides, the natives of territories outside Macedonia often demonstrated a much greater criticism, independentist fervor and even hostility *vis-à-vis* Sofia, than the local militants. It could seem quite paradoxical that it was exactly the polemical declarations of leaders like Hristo Cernopeev<sup>53</sup> that provoked the greatest indignation within Bulgarian public opinion as well as among the (pro-)Bulgarian intelligentsia of Macedonia with the flat identification of official Bulgarian policy to that of Serbia and Greece. Hence, one may hardly discover a correspondence between the place of origin of the Internal organization's activists and their political visions, in particular, their attitude towards the ideas of Macedonian autonomy. That is why, for some specialists, even the most "separatist" trend within the Internal organization could be

50 Makedonski naučen institut (1997), pp. 67–68.

51 Siljanov (1943), p. 498.

52 Katardžiev (2003), pp. 54–69.

53 Hristo Cernopeev, revolutionary leader of the Strumica department, champion of the Macedonian autonomism and fighter against the attempts of Sofia to control the revolutionary movement, was actually born in Northern Bulgaria (Dermanci) and was a former officer of the Bulgarian army.

seen as an extreme form of the Bulgarian leftist movement from that period.<sup>54</sup>

Similar problems appear when one takes into account the aforementioned rank and file relations between the organization and the Bulgarian Exarchate. On the one hand, even in their conflicts with Exarchist activists, the Macedonian revolutionaries were not really interested in confessional matters: the latter were related to the "national" development which had its place inside the community, while the political agenda of common action of all the "Macedonian people" transcended the confessional particularities. This idea is asserted by the socialist Dimo Hadžidimov, who stated that the organization "holds above all religious and national aspirations the banner of the liberation struggle."<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, on Macedonian terrain, the Internal organization often took the side of the Bulgarian Exarchate against the Greek-speaking Constantinople Patriarchate as well as against Serbian Church "propaganda."<sup>56</sup> All these aspects of the organization's activity make visibly difficult its translation into the terms of Macedonian nationalism. However, although they do not contradict the idea of Bulgarian ethnicity and of Bulgarian nation *within* Macedonia, the aforementioned autonomist and independentist stances may hardly be seen as an expression of a mainstream Bulgarian nationalism or, to put it into indigenous terms, of a "Bulgarian state nationalism." The separatist motives in the organization's ideology, emphasized after ilinden, rather reinforced the supra-national agenda.

## 6. MACEDONIAN "OTTOMANISM" ON THE LEFT

It would be quite misleading to try to explain all aforementioned ideological phenomena as a "purely" autochthonous trend regardless of "external" influences and transfers. The revolutionary means, structure and discourses of Macedonian liberation movement were undoubtedly under the strong influence of the Bulgarian revolutionary tradition. Even the anti-Exarchist pathos of Macedonian revolutionaries is partially inspired by previous anti-clerical revolutionary slogans in Bulgaria. Some historians also refer to the influence of international socialist movement, of Russian anarchism and of Armenian anti-Ottoman revolutionary movement on the rhetoric and the methods of Macedonian activists. However, one basic impact remains occulted by both Bulgarian and Macedonian national historiographies – the Ottoman one, as paradoxical as the existence of such may seem.

A comparison of Macedonian autonomist rhetoric with the official Otto-man-

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54 Adanir(2002), p. 146.

55 Andonov-Polanski, et al., (1985), p. 519.

56 The favorable attitude of Macedonian revolutionaries towards the Exarchist church affiliation is confirmed in Ristovski (2001), p. 53.

ist discourse would demonstrate striking typological similarities and could make more understandable the supra-national character of Macedonian revolutionary ideology.<sup>57</sup> Here are the main common points: the appeal for *brotherly cohabitation* of different "peoples" and "faiths" for the sake of the common "prosperity" and "progress," hence, the idea itself of converging *common interests* of diverse populations as an instrumental argumentation in favor of a supra-national political project. Also, the idea of justice and of *equal treatment* of every national and/or confessional group, guaranteed by the essential *tolerance* of the "leading" element – the Muslim religion as a "religion of tolerance" in the Ottomanist discourse and the "tolerant Bulgarian national character" claimed by the aforesaid article on Macedonian political separatism. Quite indicative are a number of terminological coincidences as "regardless of religion and sect" in the Ottomanist discourse and "regardless of nationality" in the statute of TMORO, as well as "regardless of sex, religion, nationality and conviction" in VMORO's statute. Last, but not least, there is another important characteristic of Ottomanism, as well as of both the Macedonian supra-nationalism and nationalism in the long run: the distrust of "foreigners," or the basic rejection of adverse "foreign interests." While the Ottomanist rhetoric opposed harshly the intrusion of Europeans in the internal affairs of the Empire, Macedonian autonomist slogans implied similarly that it was only "internal" people who could deal in a proper way with the problems of the region.

Considering all these elements, the Macedonian supra-nationalism may seem to be a kind of "mini-Ottomanism," i.e., a translation of the Empire's ideology into the smaller scope of Macedonia (and the Adrianople Thrace) as well as into the language of a liberation movement. Ironically but – from this point of view – not surprisingly, in 1908, it was exactly the stubborn left autonomists from Serres department who found a common language with their former enemies in the face of the Young Turks' Committee of Union and Progress. During the first days of Young Turks' revolution, the collaboration of the Macedonian leftists with the Ottoman activists was stated in a special "Manifesto to all the nationalities of the Empire" through which Jane Sandan-ski called his "compatriots" to discard the "propaganda" of official Bulgaria in order to live together in a peaceful way with the "Turkish people."<sup>58</sup> The loyalty to the Empire declared by Sandanski repeated to a large extent the political principles of the Committee of Union and Progress and deliberately blurred the distinction between Macedonian and Ottoman political agenda. This ideological transition was quite smooth, as long as the rhetoric of Macedonian autonomist supra-nationalism was quite close to the Ottomanist idea of the so-called "unity of the elements."

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57 Cf. Alexander Vezenkov's contribution to this collective volume.

58 Adanir (2002), p. 258.

The "anti-Bulgarian" character of Sandanski's "Manifesto" still did not mean a Macedonian nationalism, not only because of the loyalty declared to the Empire, but also because its author was in fact Pavel Deliradev – a socialist who too was non-Macedonian in origin.<sup>59</sup> During the "honeymoon" of Serres revolutionaries and Ottoman authorities, it was the "internationalist" ideas of Bulgarian socialist activists that left their stamp on Sandanski's as well as on Černošev's agenda: what were seen as "national interests" had to be subordinated to the Pan-Ottoman ones in order to achieve a supra-national "union" of all the nationalities within a reformed Empire. Thus, a number of classical liberal ideas, put forward in the Young Turks' constitutionalism, intermingled with some characteristics of socialism, imported from Bulgaria.

Such principles were, for instance, announced by a in a political program, published in August 1908 by the Serres, Strumica and Salonica revolutionary activists. It emphasizes the principle of popular sovereignty, and appeals for a democratic constitutional regime based on it. At the same time, it calls for a further decentralization and local autonomy within the Empire.<sup>60</sup> As to the statute of Macedonia and of the Adrianople *vilayet*, the document is not specific. It only emphasizes the "wider autonomy" of "the provinces" in the framework of the Empire as well as of all the "districts" and "communes" within them. This autonomy was presumed in a way to guarantee the equality of all "nationalities" and confessions.

In fact, the leftist agenda replaced the slogan of "autonomy" with the idea of federalizing the Ottoman Empire, albeit with its integrity maintained. At the same time, it was ironically the rightist activists, closely aligned to Sofia, who defended the idea of Macedonian autonomy. Under the conditions of the new constitutional period of the Ottoman Empire, activists from both wings of the (meantime quasi-dissolved) Internal organization formed diverse political parties aspiring to parliamentary representation.

Of all the political trends, the Macedonian historiography refers once again mostly to the faction of Sandanski that took the name "People's Federative Party": it is regarded as the "authentically" Macedonian one. Yet, Sandanski's party was supposed to comprise in its framework a number of ethnic sections, each one representing a distinct "nationality" of Macedonia. Its agenda expressed the federalist visions of the revolutionary left wing that addressed all the communities of "European Turkey."

This federalist project, however, failed and the only section that was set up within the "People's Federative Party" was the one of Sandanski himself and of his "co-nationals," which was actually called the "Bulgarian section." Moreover, the political and parliamentary representation of the leftist revolutionary

59 Makedonski naučen institut (1997), p. 228.

60 Andonov-Poljanski, et al., (2002), pp. 543–546.

activists only "revived" their Bulgarian national identification, as Sandanski's faction advocated the particular interests of the "Bulgarian nationality" in the Empire.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, the gradual conflict of the activists' aspirations and the Ottoman "national" or quasi-national project of the Young Turks' régime invigorated the revolutionary idea of the "complete political autonomy" of the Macedonia and Adrianople Thrace, leading to the reestablishing of the Internal organization in 1911.

One aspect of the brief collaboration between the left-wing activists and the Committee of Union and Progress seems obvious: while the Balkan national historiographies tend to eliminate any possible Ottoman influence on the "national" movements claimed by them, the case of Macedonian supra-nationalism only shares the peculiarities of Ottomanist propaganda before and during the Young Turks' régime. And, just like Ottomanism, which was interpreted as fully-fledged nationalism by West Europeans even before it acquired the same meaning for the Ottoman Muslims themselves, from a "Western" perspective, the Macedonian supra-national emancipation was (and still is) sometimes mistakenly seen as a Macedonian nationalism.<sup>62</sup> However, this does not mean that such nationalism did not exist.

## 7. FROM POLITICAL TO NATIONAL SEPARATISM?

Even before the period under scrutiny, certain writings attest to the existence of a Macedonian nationalism. Here, the first most illustrative case is the one of the autodidact Gjorgjija Pulevski who, in the beginning of the 1870s, published the first short dictionaries of "Slavo-Macedonian" language. Later, in other writings, he asserted the "Slavic" character of ancient Macedonians and, *vice versa*, the "ancient" descent of today's Macedonian Slavs. Thus in the 1870s and 1880s, began the first manifestations of a Macedonian national ideology that referred explicitly to a particular Macedonian language, descent or folk culture, distinct from those of Bulgarians, Serbs, etc.

Macedonian historians refer also to some data from the anti-Ottoman movement for national "liberation" which presumably confirm a certain attempt for emancipation *vis-à-vis* the neighboring nations and a more "ethnic" usage of the term "Macedonians." The latter is to be found in the so-called "Rules Constitution" of a "Committee of the Macedonian Uprising" as well as in its "Military directives" that are deemed to be composed during the ill-fated uprising of Kresna-Razlog in the autumn of 1878.<sup>63</sup> These documents trace a

61 Cf. Božinov, étal., (1979), pp. 566–571.

62 E.g., Hroch (1985), pp. 29, 174.

63 Andonov-Poljanski, et al., (1985), pp. 267–284.

project of administrative structure of a future autonomous Macedonian state while the Slavs from the region are named "Macedonians" instead of Bulgarians or Serbs.

The Bulgarian historians denounce the authenticity of both documents.<sup>64</sup> But even if one assumes that they are authentic, they were literally "excavated" by modern historians: the marginal influence of theirs is confirmed by the fact that they left virtually no trace in the public sphere of the late 19th century. There are nevertheless some cases, which had a public impact.

In 1891–1892, the Bulgarian bishop of Skopje, Teodosija Gologanov, cut his allegiance to the Exarchate and asserted in a similar way an ethnic difference between Macedonians and their Orthodox Christian neighbors. By the time of the Balkan wars and the first division of Macedonia, these ideas were most fervently defended by a group of activists who already in 1903 had founded in St. Petersburg a "Slavo-Macedonian Scholarly Literary Society." Its leader – Dimitrija Čupovski – is the author of a number of articles and memoranda appealing for an independent Macedonian state that were published in his newspaper *Makedonskij golos* [The Macedonian Voice].<sup>65</sup> This political project was no longer a supra-national one, as Macedonia was in the first place conceived as the state of "Macedonian Slavs," both non-Bulgarian and non-Serbian by ethnicity. It is exactly this ideological trend that was generally (self-)identified as *national separatism*, and may be regarded as "fully-fledged" Macedonian nationalism. Its most important theorist is the philologist and journalist Krste Misirkov, an activist of Čupovski's circle, who formulated its basic principles in his political pamphlet "On Macedonian matters."<sup>66</sup>

Misirkov's national separatism is most resolutely declared in his *volksgeistig* emphasis on a separate Macedonian national language considered to be the harbor of the national spirit [narodniot duh]. His text is actually the first serious attempt at standardizing the Macedonian language. At the same time, "On Macedonian matters" contains some conceptual oscillations and rudiments from the doctrine of Macedonian supra-national political identity. For instance, although he speaks on behalf of "we, the Macedonians (Slavs)" [nie, makedoncite (slovenite)], Misirkov refers likewise to "other Macedonian nationalities" [druzite makedoncki národnosti] like the Vlachs or the Albanians. Even the pro-Serbian and pro-Greek Macedonian Slavs are labeled as "nationalities" [národnosti], which actually contradicts the idea of a unique Slavic element. At the same time, the Macedonians are designated consecutively not only as a "nationality" but also as a "population" [naselenie or žitel-stvo] and "people" [narod], the meaning of this term being especially ambiguous. "People" could refer exclusively to the Slavs or, similarly to the supra-national

64 Hristov (1983).

65 Andonov-Poljanski, et al., (1985), pp. 595–605, 610–617.

66 Misirkov (1903).

usage, to all the ethnic or confessional elements. Misirkov speaks, for instance, of the relations between "the Macedonian peoples" [make-donckite narodi], of the "convergence of interests of all Macedonian peoples." The term "nation" appears rarely and is contrasted to the term "nationality": e.g., Misirkov suggests that, in Macedonia, there are many "nationalities" [nacionalnosti] while "a distinct Macedonian Slavic nation [naciia]" does not yet exist (p. 46). This usage actually implies that the "nation" is seen as a political phenomenon of a "higher" degree, transcending a multiplicity of actual ethnic and/or confessional particularities. Here, quite in the same way as the revolutionary political separatism, the common designation "Macedonians" is recommended as an inter-communitarian compromise [kompromis]. But this time, despite all inconsistencies in the text, this compromise concerns mostly, if not exclusively, the Slavs of the region, the latter being affiliated to three different "propagandas": Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian.

Referring to Misirkov's text, today's Macedonian historiography assumes that the Macedonian supra-national ideology led "naturally" to a distinct nationalism. But this transition is far from being non-problematic, and the bridge between political and national separatism is anything but obvious. The Internal organization's leaders rejected the national-separatist idea of promoting the Macedonian into a distinct language.<sup>67</sup> They opposed Misirkov's program and his book seems to have been burned in Sofia by TMORO activists. When, in 1905, Čupovski tried to organize a "Pan-Macedonian conference" in Veles, he was expelled from the town by a local chief of the Internal organization.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, the Macedonian nationalists did not recognize their program even in the allegedly "anti-Bulgarian" autonomism of Sandanski and, in 1914, accused him of "non-Macedonian" activity.<sup>69</sup>

And, on the other hand, the context of the Balkan wars and of the First World War resulted in a new transmutation of the political affiliations as all the revolutionaries, including the most leftist ones, sided with the Bulgarian state and army against the aspirations of the other Balkans countries in Macedonia. All this shows the inconsistent character of the autonomism promoted by the local activists, for whom the idea of a "Greater Bulgaria" seems to have always been a possible alternative – especially, if such a "successful" scenario promised to preserve the integrity of their Macedonian "fatherland." What is more, in some cases, even Krste Misirkov defended the cause of Bulgarian nationalism and, after the First World War, switched several times from the Bulgarian to the Macedonian one and *vice versa*.<sup>70</sup>

67 Cf. *Makedonski pregled*, (July 25, 1905), p. 68.

68 Ristovski(2001), p. 35.

69 Ristovski(1999), p. 458

70 From this point of view, Misirkov's case seems quite similar to the one of Şemseddin Sami Frashëri – both Albanian and Turkish nationalist from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. See Bülent Bilmez's article in this collective volume.

## CONCLUSION

Contrary to the Bulgarian historiographic point of view, the autonomist revolutionary tradition undoubtedly contributed to the formation of modern Macedonian nationalism. It promoted in the long run a concurrent political loyalty that generated new symbolic boundaries and, in this manner and in certain contexts, also transformations of the sense of ethnicity. Already in 1903, the anarchist Pavel Šatev, future participant in (and victim of) the Yugoslav Macedonian state leadership, witnessed this process of ethnic or national differentiation. In Salonica's prison of Yedikule, he saw people who were feeling themselves "only as Bulgarians" but there were also others who stated that, while they were Bulgarians by "nationality," felt above all "Macedonians."<sup>71</sup>

This, and the hitherto mentioned cases actually reveal the shifting boundaries of Macedonian self-identification and the multiple régimes of its exclusivity, *vis-à-vis* other identity options. Although Bulgarians by national self-identification and supra-nationalists as a political theory, the local revolutionaries ironically created some of the premises that the specific political setting after the First World War transformed into a more influential Macedonian nationalism, decisively generalized in federal Yugoslav Macedonia. Therefore, the idea that the Macedonian national ideology and identity was created by political fiat is as misleading as is theoretically ignorant the question of since *when* exactly a Macedonian nation has existed.

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