

*Macedonia Above
All*



By

By Stoian Georgiev Tomovichin

**Translated from Macedonian to English and edited
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Macedonia Above All

Published by:

Risto Stefov Publications
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Toronto, Canada

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e-book edition

Macedonia Above all

To the numerous known and unknown patriots, martyrs of the Macedonian cause, and to my life partner Maria, who through all the difficulties during my years in prison stood tall and still carries on dignified.

The author

Stoian Georgiev – a highly virtuous son of Macedonia

Before us stands a prose, documentary manuscript. It's a shining contribution from the author to the treasury of the revolutionary struggle of our people, not only because of what the text offers, which in itself is only a pale reflection of the author's personal drama, but in the essence of this manuscript is hidden the unity naturally created between life and – the word.

The manuscript is composed of three parts from three apparently independent entities which actually intertwine and become one the very moment the reader feels excitement and closes the cover of the book. Inside the book everything that takes place between the reader and the author is rightly complemented by the reader's own temptation. If the book was twice the volume it would have still been too little; if it was shortened to half its size would our sufferings have been perhaps more tolerable? Of course not! The manuscript is exactly as it is necessary to surmise the likelihood that soon we will have a more complete documentary investigation of our suffering that took place in our own homeland!

The manuscript is entitled "Macedonia above all". This title, I get the impression, reflects exactly the very essence of Stoian Georgiev's life. His experience is not an uncontrolled anarchic youthful burst but a dignified well thought out and meaningfully chosen life path which stands above all youthful impulses. He has the highest respect for our motherland! His highest temptations are for his homeland! A home has its own meaning, a child in the home – has an even greater meaning, but what does it all mean without the sense of freedom? A man is born free and lives to be free, but outside of this context – everything is a lie. Brother and sister, mother and father, love and youth exist only because of the sense of freedom. And above everything else there is the meaning of homeland. Hence: "Macedonia above all"!

A young life and part of a dramatic childhood are trapped in this "Macedonia above all" story. A young life that is bound by permanent

political surveillance, lurking policemen, hard situations and animalistic outbursts of police rage and insolence. A young life dragged through constant murderous interrogations and incarcerations always in close contact with death. Never before has there ever been so much abuse of power as there has been in Bulgaria and other socialist countries! Never before and nowhere has a man been so disadvantaged by the police as in this socialist country for just loving his fatherland! But he was not the only one; the spirits of hundreds and thousands of innocent young men had been destroyed. Many nameless and innocent victims, in the thousands, even in the millions, disappeared in the many concentration camps! Stoian Georgiev, the author of this manuscript, is only alive by accident. But what does this mean? It only confirms the insignificance of his life in a totalitarian state and how easily it could have been turned into dust and oblivion. The manuscript "Macedonia above all" is an extremely important document which will find its place in the rich memoirs of our historiography and which will serve the Macedonian people's careful and comprehensive analysis of their revolutionary struggle in the period between Macedonia's partition and today.

Macedonia's partition in 1913, or more precisely Macedonia's occupation by Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, which in the majority of Macedonia's territory, is still ongoing to this day; particularly in Aegean and Pirin Macedonia. In these parts of Macedonia there are Macedonians still living under occupation and, in spite of all Yugoslav diplomatic farces, the occupation to this day is an absolute fact. Stoian Georgiev's manuscript does a great job of exposing that fact and among other things it should be given more significance.

The truth about Macedonia's occupation has been masked for years by the false statements made by some of our so-called "traditional friends". Now it is time to address this problem and bring the truth out to the world; internationalize it so that it can be immediately addressed as an issue of peace in Europe. Up to now the truth has been masked and frozen, in order to allow further assimilation of the Macedonian people and the destruction of their independence through outbursts of pure genocide! In this sense Georgiev's manuscript has a lot of weight as an absolute historical document because it internationalizes the Macedonian question. Also, this year he participated in person in the legal international institutions in Copenhagen as a delegate, about which he has written in this book.

Today Stoian Georgiev is just another of the thousands of Macedonian victims, made victims as a result of Macedonia's 1913 partition. Thousands of such Macedonians have been forgotten by history, particularly those forcibly mobilized into the armies of

Macedonia's occupiers the Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs and forced to fight against one another, brother fighting against brother! Thousands of such Macedonians have also been left to lie in alien graves of kingdoms and empires, also forgotten by history and covered with strange alien flags. They are not only those from the Balkan wars, but also those who came after them, those who went missing in the dungeons and prisons of Sofia, Athens and Belgrade, those forgotten in the Greek island prisons and Bulgarian concentration camps. Let us be reminded of the fact that the first Macedonian Partisan unit of the Second World War was formed in Pirin Macedonia. Let us also not forget the fact that a Macedonian People's National Revolution was fought in the coastal Aegean part of Macedonia for five years, which resulted in a huge treasonous disaster: political and economic exile of dramatic proportions. Stoian Georgiev's book is an excellent reminder of our fate.

In the state refined torture chambers of Sofia, especially designed for the Macedonians, torture methods were borrowed from the inquisitions of the Middle Ages. It is no secret that they employed red-hot iron pokers on Macedonians in order to incapacitate their ability to reproduce! This animalism will soon be exposed and will be put on the agenda before the International Community and the International Court of Justice. I only mention this in order to emphasize Stoian Georgiev's modesty in avoiding writing about his grief and describing his tortures! He doesn't do this by accident. Georgiev simply does not want to call attention to the margins, to what is fleeting. His basic ideals are freedom for Macedonia and national and natural territorial unity.

The unity which Georgiev desires mostly depends on the Macedonian people today. Peace in the Balkans and therefore peace in the entire European continent depends a lot on the resolution of the Macedonian National question, under what should be understood as absolute freedom for the Macedonian people in both occupied parts of Macedonia: Aegean and Pirin. If the new European entity does not genuinely tackle the "identity question" and the freedom of all people of Europe in a meaningful way, then it will only represent the economic and political anonymous crowd whose numeration will be no different than the numbering of objects. Freedom for the Macedonian people must be considered above all. There will be no European culture and no freedom in Europe as long as there are countries isolated: for whatever reason. We need diversity in our unity above all - we need freedom and ethnic equality for all. A country which voluntarily isolates itself from the others and attempts to rob us of our rights as Macedonians - is consciously making itself a factor against peace in Europe. It is more certain that with the passing of time our destiny will not fall into the

hands of those who close their eyes to history and the truth. Stoian Georgiev is a shining witness to an amputated life with severe phantom pains which arise from a disposed part. The disposed part is not something that can be forgotten and thrown away: it is itself a part of life.

Day by day it is becoming clearer: today there is nothing that can prevent the process of the Macedonian spiritual reunion. This process can no longer be extinguished. The manuscript "Macedonia above all" is an absolute confirmation of this and a shining example of a heroic son who ranks high in national dignity. That which is trapped inside the prison walls and torture chambers will never be reasoned! It is a fierce cry calling for help and unity! The sense of dignity and the right of one to choose their own life path are two things that confirm a person. Stoian Georgiev vividly retold us a lesson from his Macedonian experience.

Ante Popovski

BEGINNING

When I returned from work, around 6 o'clock in the afternoon on May 18, 1990, I found a small envelope without a return address under my front door containing a letter addressed to me. I opened the letter and what did I see? It was an invitation from the District Prosecutor in Blagoevgrad asking me to see him. I was requested to appear at the office of "his highness" on May 21, 1990 at 9:00 o'clock in the morning. So I said to myself: "Here we go again!"

As I recall, only a day earlier there had been a report on Bulgarian television which stated that the Chief Prosecutor of the People's Republic of Bulgaria had reviewed a number of documents pertaining to the Organization BMRO (Independent) "Ilinden", submitted to him by the Committee for the Protection of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. The report emphasized that the BMRO (Independent) "Ilinden" Organization was found to have actions directed against the security and territorial integrity of Bulgaria. As a result the BMRO (Independent) "Ilinden" Organization's President, Georgi Solunki, was informed that he had one month to register the Organization as a political party or break it up, which ultimately meant the same thing. I am saying it meant the same thing because a newly passed law regarding political parties in the People's Republic of Bulgaria, as described in the "State Gazette", would not allow national minority political parties, such as ours, to be registered.

The United Macedonian Organization (OMO) "Ilinden" was created on April 14, 1990 in the town Sandanski during a meeting attended by the leaders of four organizations: VMRO (independent) "Ilinden", the Committee on the Rights of Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia, the Cultural Enlightenment Organization "Jane Sandanski" from the village Mikrevo and the Committee of the Repressed Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia.

The main goal of the Organization (OMO) "Ilinden" was - to unite all Macedonian people under the sacred ideals of Gotse Delchev, Damian Gruev, Giorche Petrov, Yane Sandanski and others. In accordance with the Organization's Constitution, every citizen of the People's Republic of Bulgaria had the right to become a member of the Organization regardless of their political views, social and economic status or religious affiliation, provided the persons were honest and of good moral standing.

Under its program, the Organization strove to spiritually unite the Macedonian people not only in Bulgaria but also outside wherever Macedonians lived in this world. The leadership of the Organization particularly liked to emphasize that this Organization was not in

violation of the territorial integrity of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. In spite of what was said and written in Bulgarian newspapers, radio and television, calling us "traitors", "separatists", "servants of Skopje" and making other derogatory accusations in order to undermine our dignity and integrity, we were not any of those things. We simply wanted our national rights like any other human beings. There were people who, on national television, called us "political and criminal offenders", "simple people", etc. There were also those who had written about us: "Attention - separatists!" – In other words we became the victims of anyone who wanted to trample on us at any time!

This kind of daily and sometimes hourly abuse over the airwaves and in print robbed many of our people of their courage and made them afraid. It was also publicly and openly announced that after the elections, active OMO "Ilinden" members would be hunted down, prosecuted and put in prison to suffer for decades.

These were the conditions under which I received my invitation to go to see the District Attorney on May 21, 1990, as I am today writing about it in Skopje. Fortunately, a few days before that I received a telephone call from Miroslav Spirovski inviting me to attend the 1990 Valandovo Folk Festival and to participate in a meeting at the Greek border crossing in Gevgelia. In spite of the extremely strained critical situation I decided to go, so my wife and I headed towards the "Zlatarevo" border crossing. I did not take any of my important documents with me because I knew that the Bulgarian customs authorities would be very strict with me. But outside of a quick check of my luggage I was only detained at the border for forty minutes, long enough for the border security services to consult with the security organs in Petrich, Blagoevgrad and perhaps in Sofia. Finally they said that I could leave. I said goodbye to my wife by only raising my hand and off I went to Macedonia.

Waiting for me at the Macedonian customs office were my friends from Skopje who were expecting me. At Gevgelia I met with the meeting organizers and had a cup of coffee with them. We left to go to dinner in the evening and slept in a place near Lake Doiran.

I had never dreamed in my entire life, and I am now 52 years old, that I would ever have the opportunity to visit a wonderful place such as this, near this beautiful Macedonian lake where wealthy Greeks gambled their money and paid restaurant bills in the thousands of dollars. Many years ago, Kosta Mihalchev, head of the militia in Petrich had said to me: "Stoian, you only admire Macedonia from the map!"

It was natural that after years of torture, from 1956 to this day, that I had lost all hope that some day I too, like other people, would have

the opportunity to enjoy Macedonia's beautiful mother nature. Perhaps I would not have been in this situation had I not been born in Petrich where, during the fifties and sixties when I was a boy, we sang Macedonian revolutionary songs that we heard on Radio Skopje; banned by the Bulgarian authorities.

I might not have matured into a Macedonian had my mother not told me the history of her father, Ivan Minkov, who spent five years in the "Edi Kule" prison in Solun because he was a Macedonian liberation fighter, fighting against Ottoman slavery.

My grandfather Ivan was born in the village Matnitsa, on the southern slopes of Mount Belasitsa, which today is located in the Aegean part of Macedonia in Greece. He participated in the Macedonian National Liberation Struggle. Unfortunately he was caught, arrested for treason and sentenced by the Ottoman authorities to five years imprisonment, to be served in darkness.

My great grandfather, my father's grandfather, Georgi Jankulski was born in the Macedonian village Bogoroitsa (today known as Sestrino) located on Mount Ograzhden, in the Pirin part of Macedonia. When Georgi was a young man he was very strong and everyone in the village called him "Deli Georgi" (Strong Georgi). One weekend Deli Georgi and his father took the donkey and went into the woods to gather firewood. The same weekend Deli Georgi's best friend, whose name no one remembers today, was to be married. When Deli Georgi returned to the village he heard no drums or music playing so he wondered what had happened to the wedding. He asked his mother why there was no music and she told him that the Roma (Gypsy) musicians were taken away to perform for a number of Turkish men in the village café.

Upset, Deli Georgi armed himself with two concealed pistols in his sash and went to the café. There he asked the Roma musicians why they were not playing at the wedding, but they kept silent and kept "nodding" their head towards the Turkish men who by now were quite pleased with themselves, drunk on rakia (Macedonian alcoholic beverage). But as soon as the Turks figured out what was going on they told my great grandfather to: "Bak ishene Giaur!" (Mind your own business infidel!)

But before they had a chance to finish their last words, Deli Georgi pulled out his pistols and in an instant shot them all. Then in a quiet and calm voice he instructed the Roma to go and play at the wedding.

Hearing of this, Deli Georgi's mother became very upset and began to cry. She instructed him to quickly leave this place. She said: "Son, there is no longer a place for you in this village, you must leave now

and quickly go as far away as you can before more Turks come and find you.”

So, that day my great grandfather Deli Georgi left the village Bogoroitsa and went to the then small settlement known as Petrich where he soon took on a job as a goat-herder. This was around 1880. As a strong young man Deli Georgi was very attractive and was able to capture the heart and marry the lovely Stuitsa, a girl from his village, with whom he continued our “Bogoroditsa family tree” in today’s beautiful Petrich.

Today there is a 40 to 50 acre wide locality called “Bogoroichini Nivi” located on the northern slopes of the legendary Mount Belasitsa named in honour of Deli Georgi’s unscheduled departure from the village Bogoroitsa.

Georgi and Stuitsa had two sons and a daughter. The older son, Tomo, married my grandmother Elena and they had three sons, Ivan born in 1906, Nikola, my father, born in 1908 and Vasil born in 1910. They would continue Deli Georgi’s Macedonian family tree; a tree with long roots extending deep into the hills of Mount Ograzhden for many years: hills sown with the bones of thousands of Macedonian fighters; hills watered with the bitter, hurtful tears of many youth; hills that remembered the angry battles waged by Macedonian revolutionaries from the end of the 19th to the beginning of the twentieth century. Hills that 130 years after Deli Georgi’s birth still whisper about his struggle and his admirable descendants: admirable because in 1912 his son Tomo gave his life for Macedonia’s freedom.

After my grandfather Tomo died, his wife Elena was nicknamed Elena Tomovichina and his children, God bless them, until they died were called Ivan Tomovichin, Vasil Tomovichin and Nikola Tomovichin in honour of their father Tomo.

They were also admirable descendants because Tomcho, son of Vasil Tomovichin, lost his life. Vasil was killed by Bulgarian guards when he was only 24 years old. He was shot to death under the pretext that he was attempting to cross the border into Greece illegally. As a result of this Deli Georgi’s great-grandchildren, Nikola Tomovichin’s sons, Stoian and Ivan dedicated their entire lives to fight for the rights of Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia.

Stoian, son of Nikola Tomovichin and Mitra Ivanova Nakova, was born on May 18, 1938 in Petrich, a small border town situated at the foot of Mount Belasitsa. Perhaps his parents chose this name for their son because the name “Stoian” had a hard character. They somehow must have known that he would have a hard life in the future so they chose to call him Stoian (virtuous, having great self-control), meaning standing firm before the storms of time, especially in volatile times

when life would have been so much easier if a person had called themselves Bulgarian rather than Macedonian.

There are many advantages today for a Macedonian to call him or herself Bulgarian. These advantages include having a good paying job, a means to higher education, respect from the authorities, a trouble free life and so much more. But for a person who has the courage to declare themselves Macedonian, there is no end to their troubles! Declaring oneself Macedonian during the years when the totalitarian regime was in power in Bulgaria was especially difficult. To openly declare oneself Macedonian meant that one was willing to undertake physical and physiological abuse as well as many unthinkable risks.

In the autumn of 1956 I was already a student in the eleventh grade in the I-th High School "Peio K. Javorov". In early October we had a guest lecturer give a lecture in the study hall "Miladinov Brothers". The lecturer's name was Boris Vapcharov, Nikola Vapcharov's brother. Nikola Vapcharov was a Macedonian poet. Boris Vapcharov, first Secretary of the District Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party in Blagoevgrad, had come to give a lecture on the Macedonian question. The topic of the lecture was "Macedonia - a geographical term."

The man read what he had to say from his written notes but what he said made me very angry. Up until this moment I had read very little about Macedonia and the Macedonian people. But from the environment in which I was growing up I knew that what this man was telling us was not right. I absolutely could not stomach what he was saying because he was speaking about me, who for my whole life was Macedonian.

I decided to ask Vapcharov a couple of questions. I asked:

1. Where did the ancient Macedonians go after the Romans arrived in the Balkan Peninsula?

2. What did Gotse Delchev, Damian Gruev, Giorche Petrov, Yane Sandanski and all like-minded people fight for?

Boris Vapcharov's replies were very superficial and unconvincing. The first question he answered like this: "The Ancient Macedonians were Greeks". As for the second question he said: "Gotse Delchev and his allies were Bulgarians and fought for the liberation of Macedonia in order to join it to Bulgaria."

Naturally I was not pleased with either of Vapcharov's answers so I walked out of the lecture hall. I then immediately began to fashion an etching on a stamp with the word "Macedonia". I worked for three nights with a knife, a needle and a number of other tools to create the stamp. I then placed blotting paper moistened with ink in a shoe box

and began to stamp the word “Macedonia” on thousands of pieces of paper.

One word and a young conspirator kept the entire police force in the Blagoevgrad District busy and tense for the next two months. This went on until the dreaded Wednesday, November 26, 1956 when, at the entrance of our high school, my friend Toma and I were detained by two state security agents. I will tell you about this later.

When I was in the ninth grade in high school I was introduced to a dark eyed girl, not very pretty, but who spoke so sweetly that it felt like honey flowed from her mouth. It was not anything in particular that she talked about but whatever it was, in me a 15-16 year-old boy, she awakened a sense of idealism for which I gave it my all. Unfortunately the girl found another friend and I was left disappointed.

In 1954 I attended grade nine with a boy named Liupcho Rupanov. He lived in my neighbourhood and was very weak in math.

I don't know how he managed but Liupcho completed grade nine. I on the other hand, who had much higher marks and an “A” in most subjects, did not make it! Why? I suspected because I was Macedonian! This was my first time coming into collision with the “Bulgarian way” and from then on I began my long and hard route to Macedonia.

My grade nine Bulgarian language class was taught by a lady teacher from Sofia who went by the last name Georgieva. I don't know why but we, her students, among ourselves called her “the Goat”. She did not like me at all because I would not make the effort to speak literary Bulgarian. When I was asked a question I replied in the same language that I spoke at home. I refused to speak any differently. I preferred using Petrich words and expressions; the kind we used at home. Unfortunately that made her even madder and she did not hesitate to take her anger out on me.

What made her especially angry was when I intentionally said, “Madam this is the Macedonian language that I am speaking!”

But for the “Macedonian language” that I demonstrated in front of her, she failed me and I lost my entire year of school. I was very embittered by it, especially since I was one of the top students in my class and no one was better or faster in doing their school work than me.

Because I always helped my classmate Liupcho with his work, my classmates began to tease me saying: “The student made it into to the next grade while the teacher failed and will have to repeat grade nine.” I was called “the teacher” because I helped Liupcho with his math.

I lost a year and it caused me a lot of grief, especially the next year when I had to repeat grade nine. I went to school without any interest, despondent and with low morale.

I now realize that I was embittered for nothing for the one year I lost. What I lost afterwards for insisting on being a Macedonian and struggling for our Macedonian independence, was ten times worse, more significant and more frightening!

I caught up with Liupcho in grade ten and we again began to go to and from school together. That was in 1955 when we were both in our teen years and nearly every evening took the opportunity to go for a walk. In those days it was fashionable for two or three people to walk together. We walked from the restaurant “Iavorite” (maples) which we then called “Parkot” (Park) to the Petrich town square. The place was busy and there were unbroken rows of people flowing uninterrupted in both directions. If you ever wanted to meet someone, chances were you would find them there walking.

Both Liupcho and I became interested in two girls from the eighth grade in our high school. Their names were Velichka and Vaska. Both lived in our neighborhood so, for the next 3 to 4 months, we looked for ways to meet them and talk to them. The winter was very cold and we spent many cold days gathering courage until one day we finally managed to talk to them.

It was May 1956 and nature was already decorated with colorful flowers. The hills of Petrich Mountain were loud with the chorus of bird’s songs, many wonderful melodies competing; one bird attempting to out sing another, trying to prove its love or wanting to be loved. Amidst the many bird’s songs stood the song of the nightingale with that sweet, stretched out lovely melody “piu-piu-pii-piu-piu-pii.”

In spite of the great intellectual opportunities presented to us, no one as of yet has been able to solve the mystery of the bird’s song, to be able to translate it and describe what that chirping magic means. It is well known that birds have their own way of communicating, but what are they saying?

The spring aroma of the blooming grasses, the blossoming flowers attracts thousands of bees that constantly fly from flower to flower, tirelessly guided by instinct that they need to collect nectar for their offspring, not realizing that after forty days of living in this crazy game they leave this world without ever returning.

And in that wild frenzy of a living nature, in the middle of the cool and fresh Balkan air, I and “my” Velichka were slowly climbing up “Love lane” beside the hunter’s house. Finally after several months of fruitless chasing “our” girls, they finally came to the realization that Liupcho and I were serious boys worthy of their attention.

I asked Velichka: “Tell me Velichka, why did you avoid us for so long and never once stop and talk to me?”

And she said: "Well, because I am still very young."

Indeed, she was only fourteen years old, a fragile, gentle little girl of medium build. But that did not matter to me because I wanted to have a friend for the future, someone I could enjoy being with and talking to. That is why I tried so many times to talk to her.

"Velichka," I said to her seriously, "did you not see that all winter I was trying to meet you? Every time I passed by your house I looked at your window in hopes of seeing you."

She lived only about 400 to 500 metres away from my house and the shortest route to my high school, which I took twice daily, was past her house on "Kiril and Metodi" Street. Every time I walked by her house, she stood at the window. So every day she met and intercepted my look until we finally met face to face that spring day.

As I spoke she bowed her head and listened in silence while gently digging at the soft moist soil with her foot. We stood alone on "Love lane" near some bushes. Finally, encouraged by her silence, I said: "Velichka, I can't sleep at night because I think about you all the time".

She looked at me with her shy eyes and quietly said: "I can't sleep either."

When I heard those words the entire world began to spin around me. I heard what she said but at the same time I could not believe that it was true. I looked at her with a stunned look on my face for about 20 to 30 seconds until finally, instinctively, I grabbed her by the arms and gave her a long passionate kiss on her hot lips.

That was one of the happiest moments in my life because it was the first kiss I had exchanged with a girl.

A great love began that day which would have been the envy of many. We found a quiet place near "Love lane" and saw each other and enjoyed our mutual love every day. We went to the cinema together. When they took us to "labour day" activities, be it harvesting chestnuts in Belasitsa or picking cotton in the fields, regardless of the different classes we attended, Velichka and I were always together. I felt really happy because our love was mutual, full and lasting. She truly believed in my feelings and hoped to become mine one day. We both felt like crying out of love. We used to say to each other: "Only death can separate us." But as people often say, "Too much good is not good!"

So our love did not end well. About six months after our first meeting we were forcibly taken apart for an indefinite period of time, during which each of us lived on our own. It was a time when I fell in love with both Velichka and mother Macedonia! I had already made a stamp with the word "Macedonia" and had stamped thousands of pieces of paper and spread them all throughout the city Petrich and its surroundings.

I believed that there was reason for a man to live. I, along with my friend Toma, was devoted to our secret activities. It was the fall of 1956 and we both were students in the eleventh grade. Besides Toma, Ivanov and three other students from my class had joined our “organization”. They were Zhivko Donkiev and Vasil Kantardzhiev both from Petrich and Veselin Palushev from the village Kapotovo, who to this day has not stopped loving mother Macedonia.

Naturally I had Velichka, my first love involved in my secret deeds, who at the time was expected to embroider the flag of our next Macedonian revolution. Such was our youthful vigour and audacity. We all had sworn in the name of something sacred, but we did not know what that was, but we strongly wanted it to be something. We thought that in only a few nights we could organize thousands of Macedonians and like a bolt of lightning; we would strike and unite the three parts of Macedonia - Vardar, Pirin and Aegean!

We began to look for “like-minded” people in “Gotse Delchev” High School in order to build our Macedonian youth organization with people from the territory of Petrich, which was unheard of before and which, like my first love, I will never forget.

Then, on November 26, 1956, for the first time I fell into the paws of the State Security Services.

After detaining us at the entrance of “P.K. Iavarov” High School, the State Security agents brought us to the Ministry of Internal Affairs Regional Administration office in Petrich. The Chief of Administration there was Captain Shakin - an extremely wild person with a hideous look. Perhaps that’s why he chose such a career. For the many times I met with that man, I never became comfortable around him. But he never laid a finger on me!

I have met other chiefs like him, with higher and lower ranks, and in their eyes I found some warmth and, once in a while, I would even notice a smile. But never in this person! When you were in his grasp you felt like a mouse circled by a snake ready to strike.

Following his orders the guards took me into a room where a stout, tall agent was waiting for me.

He asked me my name, where I came from and why they had brought me here. I replied that I knew nothing about the case. He then began to search my pockets and when he found a crumpled piece of paper with the word “Macedonia” stamped on it, he cheerfully asked: “Where did you get this?” I said, “I found it on the street!”

He continued to search my pockets, including those inside my school sweater where he found several pieces of paper with the word “Macedonia” stamped on them. He looked at me with a victorious look

in his glossy eyes as a half-smile developed on his lips, a sign of satisfaction. "And whose are these?" he asked sternly.

I took about 10 to 15 seconds to think about what to say, whether to lie or not? If I said they were not mine, then who put them in my pocket? My thoughts were moving at lightning speed looking for the best and most convincing answer to explain how the pieces of papers in his hand were not mine. Unfortunately the interrogator lost patience at my silence and once again yelled out: "Whose pieces of papers are these?!"

"They are mine," I said while looking at the floor.

At that very moment I felt a terrible slap on my left cheek. I saw stars fly before my eyes in broad daylight but I kept my self-control. I made no sound or motion and stood there as if nothing had happened.

Then suddenly I was awakened from my daze by his startlingly loud voice asking: "With whom did you make these things?" "I made them by myself," I replied. "Where?" he asked. "At home," I said.

"Go!" he said in a loud, strong, commanding voice while he pushed me out through the door.

When we went out in the yard there was a jeep with two agents in civilian clothes waiting, ready to go. We sat in the jeep and after driving about 5 to 6 minutes we arrived in front of my house.

We went upstairs and entered the kitchen and to the startled amazement of my parents, I showed them the stamp, the inkpad and a few unmarked sheets of white paper which they immediately collected. They also looked through various places in the room hoping to find something more important, more significant, but when they didn't they took me outside.

My poor mother, she kept silent frozen with fear. She looked very sad and tears were rolling down her cheeks.

We got back into the jeep and headed for an unknown destination. Half an hour later, after our departure from Petrich, the jeep stopped in front of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Regional Administration office in Blagoevgrad.

As soon as we got off the jeep the agents surrendered me to the duty officer there who shoved me in a narrow room, searched me and then took me through a corridor in the direction of a door covered with brown leather. We stopped in front of the door. The duty officer knocked and waited for a reply. When he heard "yes" he opened the door and asked the young officer inside: "May we come in comrade lieutenant?" "Yes!" he said. After handing me over, the duty officer left the room.

The interrogator ordered me to sit down, showing me the chair near the door where he wanted me to sit.

I sat down and for a minute or so we looked at each other in silence. Then the interrogator began to type something on the typewriter that was sitting on his desk. "What is your name?" he asked. "Stoian Nikolov Georgiev," I said. "When and where were you born?" he asked. "I was born on March 18, 1938 in Petrich," I replied.

"Now tell me everything you did with the publishing of the 'leaflets': when, with whom and how long have you been publishing this crap?" he asked. "I did this on my own: the stamp, the printing and the distribution," I replied.

"You are lying!" snapped the lieutenant. "No, I am not!" I snapped right back, sharply.

"Who do you think you are talking to young man?" he yelled at me and after taking two quick steps he stood right beside me. He then grabbed me by my chin with his right hand and squeezed tightly while yelling "Bastard! I will beat you to pulp right here; I will kill you in an instant."

I kept quiet but the lieutenant, unable to control his temper, began to smash my head against the wall.

I still kept quiet and once he realized that he couldn't make me talk by force he pushed a button on the side of his desk and about 5 to 6 seconds later the door opened and the duty officer walked in and said: "Yes comrade lieutenant?" "Take him to his cell!" ordered the interrogator.

The duty officer took me through a maze of stairs that led into a dark basement. The basement was only lit by electric light. There were two doors at the end of the hall a couple of metres apart. About 150 cm from the floor, in the middle of each door was a small piece of sheet metal cut in the shape of a pear. Until that moment I had never seen anything like it so I had to wonder for a moment what possible purpose would a piece of sheet metal in the shape of a pear have on a door? I later discovered that it covered a "peephole" through which the guards kept watch on the prisoners.

Higher up on top of each door was a piece of blue sheet metal with a corresponding white number painted on it. We stopped in front of door number 12. The duty officer opened the door, and made a hand gesture for me to go in. After I entered the cell he closed the door behind me and turned the heavy iron key twice.

Inside the narrow cell there was a straw mattress on the floor covered with a thin, tattered blue army blanket. On top of the blanket was a pillow with a pull on pillow case. There was a half-filled iron water bucket in the corner of the cell, behind the door. It was there in case the prisoner had a bodily function emergency.

The cell was illuminated day and night by an electric lamp whose light passed through a dark net located on the inside of the window above the door. There was no natural light entering the cell.

By order of the interrogator, once a day, sometimes twice, the duty officer took me to interrogation. This tormented me a lot but I promised myself that I would protect the other co-conspirator students at any cost. I was also pretty sure that my friend Toma could not be broken and he too would withhold information.

I endured the torment for fifteen straight days and as the days I spent in my cell became harder so did the arrogance of my interrogator; he became intolerable. But on the sixteenth day, when at 6 o'clock in the morning the duty officer took me to the toilets upstairs, I noticed something that would change all that. On the wall of the washroom, on top of the sink, I noticed some writing scratched into the wall with a hard object that said: "Shan admit to the truth."

When they separated me from Toma on November 26, 1956 at the Ministry of Internal Affairs Regional Administration office in Petrich, I thought that they had released him. But I was wrong. The writing on the wall now convinced me that Toma was here, in one of these cells, also being interrogated.

In high school they used to call me "Shan" so I knew that it was Toma who wrote on the wall. But why would he want me to admit to the whole truth about our caper? Was it because he had already admitted to the truth about the leaflets and was trying to spare me any further anguish? The interrogator must have told him that I was as stubborn as a donkey trying to cross a bridge, so he was in effect trying to help me. In other words he wanted me to tell them everything because they already knew everything. I think that's what Toma was trying to tell me... tell the truth... they already know everything...

I thought about the words written on the wall a lot. I thought about them until lunch time. What do I do? Keep silent and endure the torture, or take my friend's advice and confess everything to the interrogator? At noon I decided to admit that others had participated in our conspiratorial caper.

After lunch when the interrogator asked to see me, I told him everything.

"Finally, you came to your senses!" said Nikola Mitev, the interrogator.

"Why did you have to keep silent for so long? Or did you think we didn't know what you did, with whom, when and where?" inquired the interrogator.

I listened with my head bowed down and did not react to his questions. It appeared that he was satisfied with my late "confession"

so he pressed the alarm button on the side of his desk and the duty officer promptly entered the room.

“Take him to his cell!” ordered the interrogator and about 50 to 60 seconds later I was back in my temporary home.

Two days later the duty officer came back and took me out of my cell but instead of taking me to the first floor where we usually went, he took me further up the stairs to the second floor.

Here all the doors were coated with a brown skin. The duty officer led me to one of these doors and knocked. A person inside said “yes” after which the duty officer opened the door. “We are here comrade colonel!” he said.

The colonel said: “Yes!” and ordered the duty officer to leave the room.

I greeted the colonel with a simple “Good morning”, after which I sat on the chair he pointed to.

The room we were in was quite spacious; I would guess about 35 to 36 square metres. There were several windows on one of the walls and none on the others. The wall behind the Colonel was decorated with beautiful embroidery, on which hung a portrait of Todor Zhivkov. The wall opposite to the wall with the windows was covered with a large painting of a sea bay. Hiding in the distance of the bay was a small marine boat and in the foreground, on the coast, a very beautiful girl was painted, she was fishing. I did not dare turn around to see what was on the wall behind my back.

Along its length, placed in the middle of the room side by side were two rectangular tables covered with the same kind of beautiful heavy covers. Arranged around the tables were a dozen chairs. I sat on one of those chairs after the Colonel silently pointed at it.

The man behind the desk looked fit. From the salt and pepper look of his hair I would have guessed he was about 55 years old.

“Well, young man?” said the Colonel after being busy for a minute or two looking in a folder which I assume was my dossier.

“Don’t you think it’s a little early in your life to be dealing with such complex questions to which answers have not been found for a hundred years?” he asked.

He kept asking and I kept silent. I did not know what to say. Perhaps he had the right to speak like this. He must have run into many people like me in his long career. He certainly must have read a lot of historical and legal documents to reach such conclusions.

“Now,” said the Colonel, “given that you are young and the fact that this is your first offense dealing with this complicated Macedonian question, most likely because you are a product of a misguided family, we have decided not to send you to court. But if you continue to pursue

this matter, I am not sure what will happen, but know this that you will not get away with it! You can be sure you will end up in jail!”

After telling me a few more stories from his experience, the Colonel pressed the button on the side of his desk and immediately we heard a knock on the door.

“Come,” answered the Colonel and the same duty officer who brought me here about half an hour ago opened the door. “Take him!” ordered the Colonel. “I understand comrade Colonel!” replied the duty officer and we both walked out of the room. The last second before walking out of the colonel’s office I said: “Good bye!”

Two hours after my visit with the Colonel the duty officer came back to my cell. “Out!” he ordered, “and take all of your personal belongings with you.”

I took my only personal possession, my coat, which my father had brought me two days after my arrest. I was then taken out to the yard where my friend Toma was waiting for me. The moment we saw each other we began to laugh uncontrollably and neither one of us knew why we were laughing. We figured we laughed about nothing or perhaps we laughed at the joy of being free and together again? Perhaps! Yes, we were free but we were never alone. The duty officer told us to wait there. A few minutes later a policeman armed with a submachine gun arrived and the three of us left for the Blagoevgrad railway station.

We did not have to wait very long for the train. By the time Toma had finished smoking his cigarette the train was there. We got on the first car in the first compartment which, as I later discovered, was only used to carry prisoners.

After two hours of monotonous clinking we had a ten minute rest period at “General Todorov” station where we switched from the normal cars to the narrow ones. From there we were taken to the train station in Petrich. And from the train station the three of us walked to the Stamcheva Building, belonging to the Petrich Ministry of Internal Affairs Regional Administration.

There Toma and I were separated and sent to two different rooms. In the room where I was sent a not very tall, thin man, whom I did not recognize, was waiting for me. He had a long pale face and his head was covered with thinning brown hair. He looked like he was in his fifties.

“Please, sit down,” said the stranger who, up to this point, I had not seen in this great city of ours.

He said “please” with a sarcastic, thin smile at the corners of his mouth. I also noticed that he had an incredibly cynical look in his eyes. He had probably met hundreds if not thousands of people like me. He

must have felt good about himself in this position because from what I found out later, he was not particularly intelligent.

He introduced himself as “Ivanov”. He said that the Party had been generous and had decided not to prosecute me. He said that what I had done during the past two months, under the laws of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, would have been judged as an anti-national act, for which the Party could have imprisoned me for five years. So, for the generosity of the Party and to return the favour, he suggested that I meet with him on a regular basis. We agreed that we would meet every Wednesday at seven o’clock in the evening at a place to be determined during a previous meeting.

That was on December 14, 1956. I parted company with “Comrade” Ivanov and I walked back to my house which I had left on November 26, 1956. As I walked in the street I felt a sudden weight lift off my shoulders. It was a strange feeling, the kind of feeling a man gets during the first hours after being discharged from a difficult situation. While I was detained I expected that I would be sent to jail but it seems that my “friends” at the Ministry of Internal Affairs had different plans for me. They figured it was more beneficial to them if this case got no attention. At least that’s what I assumed. I had no idea why they had released me, but the fact was that I was already free and could go home.

When I got home there was great joy. Both my mother and father (May God bless their souls, they died nine years ago) and my sisters cried with joy. They cried and laughed as our neighbours gathered to congratulate me on my happy return.

The next day I was back in high school with my classmates who also were very happy to see me back amongst them. It did not take too long before I was back in my old routine doing schoolwork, being with my friends etc. The meeting with my girlfriend Velichka was also wonderful.

The first thing that I did after returning home was to let Velichka know that I was free. I ran into her friend Vaska and arranged to meet her at seven o’clock in the evening, the same day. Liupcho, Vaska and Velichka arrived at seven as expected at our designated place in front of the reading room. Her strong clamping embrace and intense hugs were signs of good times to come, the beginning of a renewed relationship after being apart for eighteen days.

It was a great joy for me and for Velichka to be together again, to be left alone near the hunter’s house. We couldn’t get enough of each other’s kisses. When the idea that we were together sunk into our minds and that we were alone, just her and me, Velichka began to tell me how hard it was for her surviving the eighteen days of separation. She said

that at that time it was fashionable for Radio Skopje to play the song “Bolen mi lezhi mlad Stoian” (my young Stoian is resting sick) and that she cried for me during the entire song. Now she was weeping with joy feeling on top of the world. I too was happy and full of joy that we were together again and recognized the strong love connection between us.

Along with the great joy of being at home and with my girlfriend came the burden that every Wednesday I had to meet “Comrade” Ivanov, which upset me a lot and left me restless day and night. Despite my lack of desire, I met with the “secret agent” on a regular basis, as per our agreement, something that I never told anyone; not my parents, not Toma and not even my girlfriend Velichka. For this I suffered alone because I alone had thoughtlessly accepted those terms.

It is hard to function, to live a happy life when something bothers you deeply and you can’t share it with anyone.

I could not sleep night after night thinking about my life, about what I had done and the situation I was now in. I asked myself: “Stoian, how could you, a person dedicated to helping your people, fighting for justice for all the Macedonian people, fighting for your Macedonian brothers and sisters, end up helping our enemies?” Now our enemies expected me to help them, to work against my own people. They advised me to infiltrate various environments, provoke my own people to talk about Macedonia and Macedonians rights so that they could be arrested by the Security Service. In other words they wanted me to spy on my own people and report, to the smallest detail, their activities to the Bulgarian police so that they could be persecuted the same way I was.

I met with Ivanov on a regular basis but I never had anything concrete to tell him. This went on for over two months before he started questioning my loyalty. To prove my loyalty, Ivanov asked me to spy on a young lady. Her name was Lile Turnova. He wanted me to get close to her and find out if she was getting letters from her uncle Dan, who had illegally fled to the Federal Republic of Germany.

Fifteen days had passed and even though he had given me direct orders to do this, I did nothing. I did not want to meet with this young lady, so I kept delaying it and making excuses. I kept thinking to myself, what if she is a State Security agent? If she is, and I knew that for sure, I would be more than happy to meet with her. But what if the girl was clean and had nothing to do with the accusations leveled against her, then I would have to betray her, deliver her into the soiled hands of my enemies. Could I do that? Forsake everything I believed in? I did not want to play their game. I was respected for my beliefs and for what I did. After I came back from prison people on the street

constantly greeted me. They were amazed at the courage of this 18-year-old who worked and suffered for the rights of the Macedonian people. I am never willing to compromise that! I have always admired the work of the greats such as Gotse Delchev, Dame Gruev, Giorche Petrov, Nikola Karev, Yane Sandanski and other Macedonian sons and daughters who died for the Macedonian cause trying to liberate the Macedonian people from Turkish slavery. I am an admirer of Orche and the Solun assassins who gave their lives for the Macedonian cause by becoming suicide bombers and dying in the name of IMRO and in the name of the Macedonian people. I hate traitors! How could I then myself become one?

I could not sleep at night because my conscience was bothering me for agreeing to secretly meet with Ivanov. One night I decided that in the morning I was going to tell him that I was going to quit, that I did not want to be a traitor. Unfortunately the following couple of times we met I did not have the courage or the opportunity to tell him. After that we met at the Department of Education in Petrich in the chief's office.

When he asked me to meet Lile Turnovo, Ivanov had given me a book to read written by two Soviet colonels, with whose names I was not familiar. The title of the book was "Tainstveniot patnik" (The secretive traveler).

Waiting in the office was another State Security "friend" whom I knew as a fellow citizen from Petrich. His name was Toma Shopov. After we sat down Ivanov asked me if I had read the book and if I had met with the girl. I told him that I had read the book, but the girl - I had not yet met. He said that before we begin discussing the book I needed to know that he would be away from Petrich for a month and in his absence I would be reporting to Comrade Shopov.

I don't know where the courage came from, but exactly at that moment I said: "Here is your book and from now on I will not meet with you, Comrade Shopov, or any other State Security agent!"

The two "Comrades" looked at me with wide eyes, not believing what they had heard and found it difficult to accept what I had just said. "Don't joke with us!" said Ivanov. "I am not joking!" I replied in a serious tone of voice. "Are you serious?" asked Ivanov. "Yes I am!" I said sharply. "And who did you tell about our meeting with you? Who advised you to stop meeting with us?" asked Ivanov. "No one! It was my own decision and it's final!" I replied.

"Have you lost your mind?" asked Ivanov. "Did you ever think about the consequences of your decision? Do you know what will happen to you now? You are going to jail!" threatened Ivanov. "Do what you want with me!" I said. "I can't do what you are asking me to do. I don't have the stomach for it!"

After hearing that, the two agents became angry and began to yell and shake their fists at me, threatening to beat me. I kept quiet and in a calm voice I reminded them that violence would not get them anywhere with me, I was not afraid of them. I said, "If I have no desire to do something, no one and nothing in the world can make me do it!"

"Leave! Get lost you scoundrel!" shouted Ivanov. So I stood up, opened the door and without saying a word, calmly walked out of the office and left for home.

So, this is how my ill-conceived relationship with the Security Agency ended. In the beginning I thought that if I had a link with them it would be helpful to my work. That I would be able to find out things about the real Macedonians and be able to warn them when there was a threat of danger. Unfortunately during those two and a half months I spent meeting with the agents I experienced many sleepless nights and came to the conclusion that the life of this Macedonian activist fighting for the rights of his Macedonian brothers and sisters and also working for the State Security Services would be extremely complicated for which I felt I was not cut out. Disassociating myself from the State Security Agency gave me peace of mind and I began to sleep normally and without fear, even though I knew that agents constantly followed me. They even followed me during my evenings out with my girlfriend. But all that was much easier on me than being bound to the enemy of the Macedonian people. In other words, I was happy with who I was and with what I did, especially with my strong love for Macedonia and for the Macedonian people. I was satisfied that I was able to get out of the betrayal business and managed to not only save my sanity but to keep my name clean and untainted for the rest of my life! But to achieve all this, I still had to make more sacrifices, deprive myself of many things and suffer a lot; - which I will describe in the next part of my humble but true autobiography.

A RIDGE OF WAVES

I successfully completed grade 11 in the month of May 1957. Despite the fact that I was not serious about learning, I still graduated with a 4 average. I was interested more in Macedonia and solving our problems than learning.

I was living an unhappy life during those miserable years. My parents were poor and could not afford to buy nice clothes, not even a suit for my prom, but those were not the most important things in my life. I never felt deeply that I was seriously deprived or demanded that my parents buy me anything they could not afford. I was not like my brother who, for example, when he was about ten or twelve years old would run to the street crying and lay on the ground on his back, digging his heels in and demanding that our parents buy him a pair of shoes or something else that he wanted which they could not afford. He was not like that later in life. I was never like that because I knew that our parents were poor and barely made ends meet feeding us.

For many years my father worked as a clerk at the “Kocho Mavrodiev” school in Petrich from where he retired and received a modest pension. My mother worked on a farm in Petrich as a labourer. I was the third child in our family. I have two older sisters, a younger brother three years younger than me and an even younger sister born six years after my brother.

We lived poorly but we were a hard working family. We had to cultivate ten acres of tobacco just to make ends meet. It was not easy growing tobacco. Before my brother was twelve years old, I regularly went digging, planting and harvesting tobacco. We had a three acre tobacco field six kilometres away from Petrich, near the village Mitino. When we picked tobacco from that field I felt like crying because I had to make three long trips, leading a donkey carrying a load of harvested tobacco, every day before noon.

I was also completely dedicated to learning in those days. From the top to the bottom of my report card there was no mark other than 6 (excellent). Every summer I was chosen for free leadership courses at a holiday camp. Unfortunately I could not go, not once did I ever benefit from these well-deserved rewards. I had to work on the farm because there was no one else to transport the tobacco. When my brother turned twelve, he took over for me and I went to work at the “Prombkombinat” factory in Petrich making bricks so that I could earn some money and buy new shoes, shirts and pants. We were very poor those days up until 1957.

One day when I was returning from the brick factory in the summer of 1957, my neighbour stopped me on the street. At the time I did not

know much about him or about his life because I was not interested in those things. Bebo Kika, as we used to call him then in our neighborhood, asked me if we could talk in private that evening at 8 o'clock. I accepted his invitation and as agreed, we met at the "Belasitsa" restaurant where he worked as manager. He said not to be afraid of him and that he knew that I was tortured for my involvement in Macedonian issues. He wanted me to organize a large group of people who would struggle for the unification of the three parts of Macedonia - Vardar, Pirin and Aegean.

"I am prepared to do anything if it is for Macedonia!" I said to him convincingly.

We agreed on how to search for members, what kind of people to recruit, the kind of activities the newly recruited members should be involved in and to keep two lists of names, one for him and one for my records. We even drafted an application form which when filled out looked something like this:

"On this 21st day of July, 1957 I, Stamat Aleksov Meshkov, in the presence of Stoian Nikolov Georgiev, am here as per our prior agreement to be accepted as member of the Macedonian organization which will fight for the unification of the three parts of Macedonia.

I swear that I will work honestly and diligently for the Macedonian people and should I do something harmful to the good name of the Organization or to its members, I would be prepared to accept strict punishment."

So in the next three months I managed to recruit 70 members into our Organization, some without filling out an application.

There was a serious like-minded person in my town from the "Vizdol" District. His name was Vangel Urdov. He was not well-educated but was very devoted to Macedonia and Macedonia needed men like him. I had met Vangel at the brick factory some time ago and by mutual agreement I put him in charge of recruiting members from his district. He also attracted the likes of Ivan Karamandzhulov, Bisto and others whose names I did not want to know.

Many times Vangel tried to introduce me to a young man named Boris Popov, born in the village Vishlene. Boris had a high school education, which Vangel thought would be of value to the Organization. Boris, on the other hand, wanted to talk to the organizer of the recruitment program - that was me. Without thinking much about it, one day I accepted Vangel's suggestion and made an appointment to see Boris. On the evening of August 20th I met with him at the "Partok" restaurant where Vangel introduced us. After exchanging a few general stories I asked Vangel to leave us so that we could have a more private conversation. Vangel said goodbye and wished us a pleasant meeting.

We were both pleased to discuss issues about Macedonia. During our conversation Boris said that he had been fired from his job because he “felt” Macedonian. He then said, “How else should I feel if I want to become a member of your organization?” So I said, “You should feel like a Macedonian here in your heart first, after that you can be a member of our organization!”

“I felt like that a long time ago!” he said. “But I had no one to work with before.”

“When you feel like a Macedonian, you will have all the opportunity to sign up and be an honest fighter for our Macedonian rights,” I said. “I pledge everything for Macedonia!” he replied.

There was nothing in his tone of voice to suggest anything dishonest so I had no doubts about his sincerity and his readiness to struggle like me in the name of Macedonia.

So, after scheduling a meeting for the same time and same place for the following evening, I wished him good night and left. The next day when I arrived he was already there waiting for me. That showed me that he was serious about his commitments. I suggested that we go home to my place. Along the way we talked about ordinary things. I asked him where he was from and where he worked. He said he was born in the village Vishlene and used to work in the “Forestry industry” in Petrich, as a general laborer.

When a person believes everything someone tells them, that person should expect that they have been lied to. I trusted Vangel a lot and to this day he has remained a passionate worker for Macedonia, but I did not believe him when he told me that he personally knew Boris because I knew that Boris Popov was not a peasant boy.

For many years I regretted my irresponsible approach to meeting Boris, or as Vangel used to call him “that village ox”. I blame myself for not following up on his job, finding out who his friends were, etc. I also blame myself for letting him get close to me.

After he became a member of our organization I allowed him to come to my home almost every night. I told him how many members we had and allowed him to see some of the applications. He was very happy that we had other members, that we were not alone in our struggle and that there were other “burning hearts” like us. He also promised that he would create small organizations in all the villages in the Ograzden locality etc.

At eighteen years of age I was too blinded with enthusiasm to question some of the things he was saying, especially about the “burning hearts” and that we were “not alone in our struggle”. I could not understand what he meant by “burning hearts” when all mother Macedonia needed was “honest hearts”.

Thirty-six days after my arrest on Saturday October 5, 1957 I found out that Boris Popov did not have a decent heart. He betrayed me and the entire Macedonian nation. I will tell you about that later.

Today, Saturday, May 26, 1990, as I write about all these things in my journal, I find myself in Skopje in the capital of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. For thirty-three years I have been separated from my youth, when everything was wonderful, despite the poverty. I was happy to have struggled for Macedonia, I was happy to have continued Gotse Delchev's work. I found that it made sense to live. I used to say to myself: "A person deserves to live, to suffer and to die for mother Macedonia!"

It was like that then. But since then, I don't believe anything has changed in me to make me feel any differently about mother Macedonia. So let us go back far into the past to October 5, 1957. The previous day Boris Panchev, director of "Promkombinat" in Petrich, gave me an envelope with a letter inside it and a bag of three or four kilos of chestnuts and said: "Take these to Comrade Pene Aleksiev, Vice President of the City Council in Sandanski. Please give him my regards and tell him that we need to create a 'dyeing plant' in the Sandanski Territory."

About twenty days after the end of the brick season, I went to work at "Promkombinat", a yarn dyeing plant in Petrich. I couldn't have ever imagined that I would become a pawn in the State Security Services games and that the Plant Director was part of it. Everything seemed as it should be; how was I supposed to know that it wasn't?

So on October 5, 1957 at 7:30 in the morning, I got on the bus and went to Sandanski. After a forty minute ride the bus stopped at the then town square in front of the "Republika" restaurant. I got off the bus with the envelope and bag with chestnuts in my hands and went towards two men standing 5 to 6 metres away from me, being distracted by the passengers getting off the bus.

"Excuse me, may I ask you something?" I said as I took a few steps towards them. "Of course you may! Please do! How may we help you?" asked one of them. "I need to find Pene Aleksiev, Vice President of the City Council," I said. "Don't you know him?" the other one asked naively. "He just passed by a couple of minutes ago. Please come with us, we will take you to him," he advised.

The three of us then went for a walk along the street where most of the town's stores were located and not once did it occur to me what was happening. As we moved along they started to ask me questions, like where I was from, whether I had ever been to Sandanski before etc., until we got to a place located two minutes away from the bus station.

“Here we are. Here is where Pene Aleksiev is located,” said one of them pointing with his hand to the entrance over which was a beautiful sign with the words “Regional Administration of the Ministry of the Interior – Sandanski” written on it.

When I saw the writing on the sign I felt a cold sweat cover the entire back of my body. So I thought to myself, oh this is who the “kind and helpful” citizen of Sandanski is. I looked at the sign and I still did not believe that this could be happening to me again, not until one of the agents led me to the stairs of the narrow entrance of the building.

Waiting for me inside was “my” old acquaintance Nikola Mitev, chief interrogator at the Ministry of the Interior’s Investigative Department in Blagoevgrad, now promoted to Captain. Because of the good service they had provided for their country uncovering “traitors” like me, the People’s Government had rewarded people like Mitev with higher ranks and more incentives to go after the Bulgarian people’s “enemies” with even greater enthusiasm.

I just want to make it clear at this point that we Macedonians respect the Bulgarian people and their rights but at the same time we also respect ourselves and our rights to be Macedonians. And because of our desire to respect ourselves and our rights, the situation was made very complex for all Macedonians in Bulgaria. We feel that we deserve to be free like the Macedonian people who lived in the People’s Republic of Macedonia because we are a part of the same people.

We admire the songs and marches transmitted over the airwaves by Radio Skopje. There was no television then.

When we entered the office, the captain greeted me: “Oh, hello old friend. What brings you here?” he said. “I don’t know,” I said, “your people led me here!” “You’re wrong ‘dear’ friend,” he said, “not they; you have to tell me why you are here!”

I did not know what to say, all I could muster was a deep sigh. I stood there stunned looking through the open window, beaten like a trapped lion in an iron cage, without the slightest hope of ever seeing freedom in the prairie from which I had been snatched. I kept quiet and thought about what had just happened, without the least of blame for the situation in which I found myself.

I really did not expect them to slyly trick me into coming to Sandanski alone where they could nab me and put me in jail without anybody seeing or knowing. But my “friends” had already had thirteen years of experience in the exposure and apprehension of “traitors” like me. They certainly had vastly greater experience than me, who was only 19 years old and could never have guessed that they would apprehend me in this way.

Captain Mitev was talking to me asking me something but I was so stunned that I could not understand his questions, even though his questions only required mechanical answers like “yes” or “no”. As soon as Mitev realized that I was stunned and would not be able to answer his questions, he ordered the duty officer to take me down to the basement where he carefully searched me and locked me in a dark, cramped cell. He left me there for about an hour and then put me in handcuffs and escorted me outside where a jeep was waiting. After about an hour’s ride the jeep pulled into a wide yard guarded by a policeman. I assumed that this was the Regional Administration office of the Ministry of the Interior in Blagoevgrad.

The duty officer here searched me again and took me through a long corridor in the single storey two-sided building with twenty symmetrically arranged doors at a distance of about two metres apart. We stopped in front of door number 4, the door opened wide and the duty officer ordered me to: “Get in!”

I got in the cell as the officer ordered and he locked the door behind me, turning the key twice. I stood there all alone in the middle of this dark cell. Lying on the wooden floor I noticed a mattress covered with a tattered army blanket. Placed at the head of the mattress were a pillow and a white pillow case.

It had not even been a year since I had last escaped the clutches of the State Security Services in 1956 and now here I was back in their grip again. This time I was in a new single-storey building, not like last time when I was in a basement. It didn’t matter though because there was no sign of sunlight anywhere in the cell area. Day and night the cells were illuminated by a buzzing electric light which drove me crazy. But in order to avoid conflict with the guards and the interrogators I had to be very patient and very quiet, as quiet as possible in order to survive, stay healthy and stay alive.

I had a lot to think about. I had had many conversations about our Macedonian issues with many people in the last three months.

There were indeed many things to discuss about Macedonia’s tormented past and present and about its future and the miserable ways in which the Macedonian people had been treated. I had said plenty and heard plenty from other people. I was now left alone, all by myself with no one to see and with nothing to discuss except to think about simpler times and the meetings and conversations I had had with the various people in my past. This whole experience was like a film running through my mind, recalling memory after memory, remembering various scenes from this uncut animated film, remembering scenes that I wanted to forget but couldn’t.

From my own experience I knew that the longer I remained silent and in solitude the more memories would emerge from my consciousness like scenes from a film. But with time, those early short animated scenes would grow both quantitatively and qualitatively and turn into full feature movies. The conversations and exchanges of ideas I had had with the various people I met would become clearer and more defined. So, all I did day and night in isolation was think about everything I had seen and heard.

The duty officer came to my cell and said it was time to go. When we entered the interrogation room the duty officer asked for permission to leave and the interrogator and I were left alone in the room. We looked at each other in silence for about 30 to 40 seconds, each busy with their own thoughts, until the interrogator finally spoke up, breaking the awkward silence. He said: "Welcome old friend! Welcome and sit there!" pointing to a chair. "Thank you!" I said and sat down.

"It is time for us to resume the conversation that we started yesterday in Sandanski!" he said with a gaze fixed directly at my eyes. "What is there to talk about?" I asked. "Oh, there are plenty of things we need to talk about, my 'dear' friend!" he said. "And, should a person have no desire to talk about these things?" I asked half jokingly. "Even if you don't have the desire, we have the means and the time to make you talk. There is only one thing that you need to understand – the more open you are, the more honest you are with us the easier it will be on you. You also need to understand that it is in your best interest to go back to the beginning and tell us everything, in the smallest detail, from start to finish after your release in the month of December last year," he said.

The interrogator spoke softly, friendly without having to raise the tone of his voice and I just kept silent. When he was done he said: "Okay, start talking!" "I don't have much to say!" I replied. "Are we going to go through the same scenario again?" he asked. "There is nothing else to do but talk!" he pointed out.

I stubbornly kept silent while staring at the Persian rug lying on the floor, wishing that I had been brought here to study its rich craftsmanship, a wonderful human creation. But instead I had to talk to him, who I felt was losing patience with me with every passing second, despite his attempts to be very patient with me.

I stayed silent for a few more minutes not realizing that the Captain had completely lost his cool and had jumped on me with fury, beating me hysterically. "You Idiot!" he yelled out. "Who do you think you are playing with here?" He then put both his hands around my throat and squeezed, while shaking my head and hitting it against the wall behind

me. After receiving five or six blows to my head I spoke up and said: "What do you want from me?" "Tell me about your friend Kika, when you met him for the first time and what he told you to do," he said.

"Well, that's something else!" I said triumphantly, a bit distraught from my episode with the Captain. Because I was detained in Sandanski much earlier than anyone else, I had no idea if anything at all had happened to the other members of our revolutionary organization... I call it 'revolutionary' because we then envisaged the use of force to resolve the Macedonian question. We thought that if we started fighting in Pirin Macedonia, our free brothers in Vardar Macedonia would come and help us. Besides living free and being recognized as Macedonians today, many of them had spent many years in Yugoslav prisons because they also wanted to unite the three parts of our divided country. So surely they must have known how it felt to be occupied and oppressed! But how were we expected to know how people felt about us on the other side of the border when we were separated from them for many years with barbed wire and closely guarded by Bulgarian border guards?

From 1940 to November 10, 1989 Bulgaria was one huge prison, one great big concentration camp in which no man could say a word or complain about the establishment and not get caught and arrested. At that time two out of three people were directly or indirectly connected with the State Security Services. As a result thousands of people were prosecuted and sent to jails and concentrations camps where many found their end.

My faithful service to the Macedonian people must have troubled them deeply. Being here again in Nikola Mitev's office I was reminded of what he had said to me last time and I was struggling to find out who the person was who betrayed me and all the others. I no longer needed to keep silent so I briefly told him about my talk with Bebo Kika. As I kept talking the Captain kept asking questions and typing away on his typewriter.

Finally, after about an hour and a half of interrogation, I read the three pages he had typed up and then signed them. When we were done he called in the duty officer and he took me back to my tiny cell.

And thus began my second journey into uncertainty. Almost every day and sometimes twice a day I was taken in for interrogation. I was asked a thousand questions about this, about that, multiple times about the same thing; once, twice, three times, four times, etc., etc.

I told them many things and many things I hid from them. During my thirty-sixth day of imprisonment the interrogator forced me to sign the following statement: "I, Stoian Nikolov Georgiev, the undersigned,

with this signature certify that my testimony is complete and that I have left nothing out. Otherwise, I accept all consequences!”

After I signed the statement, the Captain took it and began to read it out loud with a triumphant smile on his face, extending from ear to ear. When he finished reading it he began to laugh hysterically. “What’s so funny?” I asked. “You will not regret your impudence!” he said with an irritating tone of voice. “I will not regret it!” I replied decisively. At that point he walked over to his desk opened a drawer, pulled out a folder and slammed it on the desk and shouted: “Read these and tell me who wrote them!”

I took the folder, opened it and what did I see? The application forms which I had written myself, I recognized my own handwriting. I looked at them, then I looked at the interrogator who at that point was carefully watching my reactions. I again looked at the application forms and then at the interrogator. I then suddenly burst into uncontrollable laughter which lasted about a minute. While I laughed tears ran down my cheeks. I had never felt such shock in my entire life. I laughed and cried simultaneously because now I finally understood that I had been played and I had finally got my clue as to who had sold me out.

The application forms that I held in my hand were filled out by me, which I had hidden at home in the opening of our fireplace chimney. They were well-hidden and very difficult to find unless someone knew about them. So how did the interrogator get his hands on them? The only other person besides me who knew about their whereabouts was Boris Popov, that pretend Macedonian patriot from the village Vishlene, whom I had unfortunately and completely trusted. Well it was my own fault, my “naivety” made me both laugh and cry. Unless you have experienced something like this in your life, it is difficult to explain how I felt.

A minute or two later, the interrogator said: “Well, what do you say now my ‘dear’ friend?” “I have nothing to say!” I replied.

“Do you think we don’t know anything?” he said. “Do you think we are wasting our time here with you and with others like you? No, young man, we know everything about you, Toma, Stamat, Vangel, about your teacher “Kika” and all the others in your organization. We know your pseudonym is “Sukarno” etc. Now tell me, what were you going to do after you created your organizations?” he asked.

“Our aims were to get the Bulgarian State to recognize us as Macedonians.” I replied. “What Macedonians?” snapped the interrogator infuriated! “We are Bulgarians since time immemorial!” he insisted. “No, my dear friend, I am not Bulgarian, I am Macedonian!” I replied. “And where do you know that from?” he asked.

“Where do I know that I am Macedonian?” I repeated the question. “From my own mother!” I replied. “Her father Nako Ivanov was born in the village Matnitsa, Aegean Macedonia. He was put in the “Edi Kule” prison in Solun for five years because he fought for Macedonia’s freedom. My grandfather Tomo, from my father’s side, was killed in 1912, again for the honour of Macedonia. From all this I know for a fact that I am Macedonian!” I insisted.

“So then how do you see the realization of your ideals? With arms in your hands?” he asked. “I believe the Macedonian issue can be solved within a Balkan Federation, as Dimitar Blagoev proposed during his time,” I replied. “Those are childish and naïve ideas that can not be attained!” he retorted.

“Do you mean to tell me that Dimitar Blagoev was naïve and childish when he put his idea before the Bulgarian National Assembly on November 14, 1917, when he said: ‘I am Macedonian and the Macedonian people are different from the Bulgarian nation!’” I asked. “Well, Dimitar Blagoev made a big mistake!” he replied.

“And did Gotse Delchev, Yane Sandanski and thousands of Macedonian fighters who laid their lives before the altar of Macedonia; did they all make a big mistake?” I asked. “But they all felt Bulgarian and fought for the liberation of Macedonia and its annexation to Bulgaria,” he insisted. “Unfortunately, that is not the truth!” I replied. “They fought by all means possible against the Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek propaganda,” I concluded.

“Leave history out of this, just look after your own situation!” he said. “Look after what? It is clear: I am here and what happens to me depends on you,” I replied. “Young man, it does not depend on us, it depends on you. Last year I advised you not to get involved in these damn Macedonian matters, but instead of heeding my advice you completely ignored it! Now you will face the consequences,” he exclaimed. “So, this must be my destiny then,” I said calmly. “Perhaps you’re right!” he said and pressed the button on the side of his desk. Seconds later the duty officer appeared and took me back to my cell.

So, day after day time went on slowly and torturously for 113 days, until the investigation was completed and we were sent before the District Court in Blagoevgrad. During the trial, which took place on February 8, 1958, the prosecutor accused us of wanting to destroy the People’s Republic of Bulgaria’s socialist order and break away the territory of Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria. For that we were given 5 to 15 year jail sentences.

According to the judgments made and charges read, I was charged as follows: “The District Court of Blagoevgrad, by ruling number 142 of 08.02.1958, in accordance with NOHD Article 93, paragraph 1 of 2

in conjunction with Article 82 and Article 36 of N.K., condemns Stoian Nikolov Georgiev to four (4) years imprisonment. He is also to be deprived of his rights under Article 28 of N.K. for a period of seven (7) years and to be fined 200 leva in favour of the state. This judgment shall enter into force on 17.09.1958.”

Kiril T. Ruzhkin (Bebo Kika) was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. Stamat Meshkov and Toma Ivanov were sentenced to a year and a half each. Vangel Urdov was given a 2 year sentence.

The trial was held behind closed doors. Many of our friends from Petrich came to the Court but only our closest relatives were allowed in. My trial was attended by my parents, sisters, brothers-in-law and by my brother Ivan. At the time I was still not married and had not done my army service.

When the trial was over we were given ten minutes to see our relatives and after that we were loaded on a truck and taken to the Sofia central prison. Here they separated us and placed us in jail: Bebo Kika was placed in a cell with other inmates, Vangel and I were placed together in the same cell with several others, Toma and Stamat were placed in a different cell.

On the twentieth day after we had been put in jail, they transferred Stamat, Toma and Vangel to the Starogorsko regional jail. Bebo Kika and I were transferred to division five of the same jail that we were in and we were put to work in the sewing workshop.

After three months of working in this jail I quit my job because I did not have enough time to read and study French. As a result, they transferred me back to division seven where I spent the next seven months. After that I was transferred to the Starogorsko regional jail. As soon as I arrived some of the prisoners, when they found out that I was from Petrich, told me that Vangel, Stamat and Toma were also there but were working at the quarry near the village Kaloianovets, in Starogorsko Region. I asked the administration to transfer me there.

A week later my transfer came through and I was back with my friends Toma, Vangel and Stamat. We rejoiced that we were back together again, safe and sound, even though we were in jail. Here I met and got to know Ivan Kuchkuderov, a young man from the village Chereshnitsa serving a two year sentence, convicted of pursuing the Macedonian question. I knew about Ivan from Dimitar Terziev with whom I had spent about a month when we were being investigated in Blagoevgrad.

In the Sofia prison I also met a young man named Timlio Zaprev from the town Gotse Delchev. He had been convicted three times for pursuing the Macedonian question and each conviction carried a three year prison sentence. Others that I met in the Sofia prison included Ivan

Bikov from the village Samoilovo, sentenced to two years in prison for pursuing the Macedonian question and Stanko from the village Cherniche, Blagoevgrad Region, sentenced to two years imprisonment for pursuing the Macedonian question.

At the Starozagorski prison I met Kitan from the village Gara Pirin, sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in 1949. He along with 148 other defendants were tried in a large trial and convicted for pursuing the Macedonian question. Here I also met many young men from Pirin Macedonia who had spent a good part of their lives in jail, put in prison by the Bulgarian authorities because they were fighting for the rights of the Macedonian people.

Looking at it philosophically, what is a prison? A prison is a place of isolation, where the convicted serve their sentences without freedom. Freedom is a great asset, greater than having millions of dollars. Nothing can replace freedom because it is a much desired gift of nature! As it was written in the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, people are born free and equal in dignity and rights, regardless of race, colour, political views, social status, education, gender, language, religion etc. People are free regardless of where they live be it in a free territory or under a protectorate. Every person has the right to be free and every other person must respect that right.

Those sacred human rights are missing in a prison! Here people have numerous duties and are entitled to work and rest only in accordance with prison rules – this includes political prisoners. Life in prison is grey and monotonous but slightly more bearable than that of a person going through interrogation.

I became used to being in prison and sometimes I thought that I had been born there and that another world, a different world outside of the prison, did not exist. Well because of this kind of mindset and because of this kind of mental state, a person ceases to feel imprisoned. Take me for example; I felt I never had enough time in prison, even though we were awakened at 6 o'clock every morning. I was busy all day, I constantly read books and sometimes drew pictures – of which I have none to show. Everything was confiscated in the prison. Every three months they came into our cells and took everything that we had written or drawn. I drew Paul Gauguin's "the girl with a fan" and that too was confiscated.

While I was in the Starogorski prison during the spring of 1959, for example, I translated the history of the Ancient Macedonians chapter from the French book entitled "History of the Ancient People", but that too was confiscated. I was unable to bring it outside the prison walls. While still serving my sentence inside Starogorski prison, I also wrote a letter to Todor Zhivkov, Minister, President and First Secretary of the

Communist Party of Bulgaria, in which, among other things I said: “Sir, until when are you going to play politics with Macedonia and with the Macedonian people? You, Mister Zhivkov, in recognition of their States, have hosted ministers from Cuba, Ghana, Cameroon etc., but what have you done for Macedonia? Where does your loyalty lie, Mister President?...”

Because I wrote this letter, about three months later I was taken to see Colonel Tonev the prison inspector. When I entered his office I greeted him with the words “Good Day!” “Good!” he replied coldly without inviting me to sit down even though there were six chairs in his office. By his mannerism and by the expression on his eyebrows, I knew I would be having a conversation with a “not very nice” man.

“What is your name?” he asked. “Since you invited me here, surely you must know my name?” I replied. “You must answer!” he yelled out loud. “Stoian Nikolov Georgiev,” I said. “Where are you from?” he asked. “I think you know where I am from,” I replied. “Young man, you need to understand that I am asking the questions here and you need to answer them!” he explained. “I am from the city Petrich,” I replied calmly. “Why don’t you want to sign the agreement for the socialist competition?” he asked.

“Because I feel that only free people should compete; if I were free out there then I would sign, but not in here. It seems to me that you are deliberately entering competitions between mine pits in order to find out who agrees with your politics here in the prison. I cannot accept all that as normal,” I replied. “So, what are we doing with the prisoners?” he angrily yelled out loud. “You beat them and mistreat them!?” I replied. “What were you convicted of?” he asked. “The Macedonian question!” I replied. “So, you are a little man trying to solve big problems, eh?” he said.

“No! I just wanted to understand the problems. And that’s why they put me in here,” I replied. “How many years are you in for?” he asked. “Four,” I replied. “You are lucky they only gave you four! They should have given you more!” he said. “Obviously those who sentenced me were not as stupid as you!” I replied angrily.

The Inspector found my reply a little hard to swallow so he called in the duty officer who was waiting in the hallway and listening to our conversation. When the duty officer appeared at the door, the Inspector ordered him to: “Take this idiot to solitary!”

The duty officer grabbed me by my arm and pulled me out into the corridor. Here he tried to hit me with his fist, but I successfully blocked his blows with my hands and slipped back into the room. When he realized that he would not easily beat me down he slyly said: “Get out here!”

I put my hands down and took a step out towards the corridor. The old bully then took advantage of the situation and, with lightning speed, punched me hard in my stomach. The blow was so strong I folded over forward. He then took advantage of that and gave me a hard blow to the back of my neck. A second or two later, he kicked me in the butt. I barely could refrain from hitting him back. At one point I felt like hitting him but then I remembered where I was and decided not to. It was wise for me to refrain because a couple of days before one of the prisoners here was brutally beaten for defending himself and they had to put him in sheepskins. Thinking about this made me endure my beating. I had to remember that those who dared stand up to these bloodthirsty bullies paid with their lives. If I fought back the other guards in the next room would have beaten me to death.

So after my “conversation” with the Inspector, which took place at the end of July 1959, I was put in confinement twice, 14 days each time, which I will never forget.

The confinement room was located under the kitchen of the Logorska prison. It was a dark airtight room 2 x 2 x 2 metres (or 8 cubic metres) with a wooden floor. The only hole in that small room was a door 190 x 80 cm. When the door was closed the cell was completely dark and without any air circulation. The only amenity available to us inside the room was a bucket of water which was emptied once a day in the morning.

After they put us in confinement they locked the door with a padlock from the outside. There were five of us in this small room. One of us was a fragile old man. His name was Kolio. He was from one of the Starogorski villages. This man sat day and night, because there was no room for him to lay and stretch out his legs. We the younger ones, Milche, Ivan Koshlenski, Pesho and I stood upright most of the time.

The weather outside was very hot which made it hot and stuffy inside but we were not allowed to open the door. To get some fresh air I secretly forced open the corner of the door a crack and waved my shirt vigorously to circulate air. Unfortunately the guards caught on to me and put two padlocks on the door. Now the door was completely shut along the entire length and we were forced to breathe stale air, panting like dogs in hot weather.

In the morning, at lunch and in the evening, when the guards opened the door to give us our soup and bread, they ran away to avoid breathing in the putrid air that gushed out of the room when the door was opened. They were not even able to stand for a couple of minutes what we had to endure for a whole 14 days and nights! To protest these conditions the four of us, excluding Kolio, went on a hunger strike and refused to eat for six days. We demanded to see the District Prosecutor

to let him see for himself what was going on here. To see for himself the conditions under which the prisoners in confinement had to live. But neither the Prosecutor nor the devil came to see us. The guards said that these were not fascist times where you could demand to see the Prosecutor. So we continued to endure hunger, thirst and sleep deprivation for the first fourteen days, after which they let us out. Then in the evening of the same day they grabbed the four of us, excluding Kolio, and shoved us back in confinement for another 14 days. Thanks to my strong will and good health I was able to survive my ordeal.

On the twenty-eighth day when I was finally released from confinement and let loose among the “free” prisoners something happened to me. After my release from confinement I went straight for the outdoor bath located inside the camp. The bath was well-guarded by an armed policemen and specially trained dogs.

After I had my bath, my helpful best friends Vasko Zafirov and Kiro Tushev Dinev, both Macedonians, prepared lunch for me consisting of bread and sliced salami. I sat down, bit a chunk of bread and then some of the salami and began to chew. After I swallowed the food I felt something hot going down my esophagus. A few seconds later I felt unusually warm all over my body and began to tremble uncontrollably. My friends asked me why I was trembling. Then my jaw began to shake from shock. That too I will never forget.

And so day by day the ugly days went by, without anything memorable to mention and finally January 30, 1961 came, the day I was released from the Stara Zagora prison. I heard an expression that: “A man coming out of prison should never look back because he may end up in it again”. But I was never superstitious and did not believe in such things so I turned back to have one last look at this Bulgarian Bastille where I had spent the best years of my intellectual consciousness of Bulgaria and Macedonia. There I spent three and a half of my younger years, a time when I should have been in school, when I should have been in love, when I should have been serving my country as a soldier etc. But most of all I missed playing soccer, a much loved sport! But other than that, it was my destiny and I had to follow what was preordained for me; perhaps that is why I boldly turned to look back, to have one last look at the prison and to remember it not only for its inside but also for its outside.

I arrived in Petrich on January 31, 1961 at 9 o'clock in the morning. When I got close to our street I ran into Aunt Maria, a neighbour of ours. She instantly recognized me and said: “Is that you Stoiian?” “Yes Aunt Maria. It is me. You haven't forgotten me?” I replied. “No young man, no I haven't forgotten you!” she said and came over and gave me

a hug like I was her own son. “Run home now!” she said “Your mother is anxiously waiting for you!”

It was true; when I arrived home both of my parents were waiting for me. That day was also a holiday; Atanasov day and people were not at work. When my mother saw me she began to cry. She was happy to see me. “Don’t cry mother, I am here now!” I said. “The worst is over and a better life is awaiting us,” I added. “It is true, it is true!” said my aunt Olga as she too gave me a big hug.

In no time our neighbours began to arrive and we all joyfully celebrated my return from prison.

During the summer I went to work at the brick factory. During the fall I decided to take some time off and dedicate myself to studying French philology, an old dream of mine. But in order for me to go back to school I needed an endorsement from someone who would vouch for me that I was a Party member or a trusted Bulgarian, of which I was neither and as a result I could not apply for the course. I was left with the comfort that I was alive and well and that there were thousands of young men like me without a university degree. It has not been easy for me and to this day I feel unhappy because I did not get a good education, when I know how incompetent and how useless most of the enterprise, school etc. directors are these days.

Thus I spent my monotonous lonely time working and surviving. All my classmates from my past were in university, some were even married. But dopey me, I hung around young men four - five years my junior.

One winter night on November 20, 1961 when I was walking along the Petrich “Gezme” with my friend Vangel, we met Anche, sister of my former girlfriend Velichka, who at the time was walking with her friends Roza and Nonka. The three girls, who had just completed grade eleven, looked very beautiful. The first time we passed by them I said nothing to them but the second time I decided to ask Anche if I could talk to her in private. It was not my intention to separate her from her friends but only to enquire about Velichka.

In the ten months after my return to Petrich, I often came across Anche, but made no attempt to speak with her. She knew that I was her older sister’s former boyfriend but we both pretended that we did not know each other. I felt I had no need to talk to her. I knew she was a bit cold and unapproachable so I never expressed an interest to stop and talk with her. But this evening was different.

“For the first time since I returned from prison, Anche, I decided that I wanted to speak with you. Is that okay with you?” I asked her. “And what do you want to talk about?” she replied. “I simply want to ask you about this and about that,” I said. “Ah, so you found out that

my sister is back in town and that's why you want to speak to me!" she replied. "How come she is back?" I asked. "Well, she is back and she has been standing by the window looking outside to see if you would pass by," she replied. "Is that true?" I asked. "Yes, it's true!" she replied. "So then there is nothing more for us to talk about!" I said and walked away from everyone.

The same evening at around 9 o'clock I whistled with my usual whistle as I passed by Velichka's street and in about two minutes she was back in my embrace. "Hello, welcome back, nice to see you again!" she said. I too said hello and how nice it was to be together again after a long separation and then we shared a long kiss. "How did you know I was back today?" she asked. "I spoke with your sister Anche and she told me," I replied.

I told Velichka about my short encounter with her sister Anche and she laughed. "You know that she is a bit wild, right?" Velichka asked. "I passed her so many times during our walks in the ten months since I was released from prison but I never made an attempt to speak with her. I don't know what made me want to talk to her today. Something made me want to stop her so I gathered all my courage and stopped her, just to say hello. I then found out you were here," I said.

"So you are trying to tell me that you instinctively felt that I was here?" she asked. "Yes, there may be such a thing, or perhaps it was a random coincidence," I replied.

"It was no coincidence that I thought about you all day and that I waited for you to pass by our place. That kind of stuff is still unexplained by science. People do experience unexplained feelings you know," she explained. "Perhaps you are right!" I said as I again pulled her into my arms.

After that we went back to my place and we resumed our beautiful love affair the same way as it was before I had been taken to prison.

During the month of February they gathered all the men to be drafted as work soldiers (soldiers who will spend their entire draft working) from Petrich and the surrounding area and took them to Blagoevgrad. I was not included among them. One day I met Kitso Jankulov, an operations employee from the Regional Administration office of the Ministry of the Interior – Petrich and I asked him: "Why did they not take me when they took the work soldiers from Petrich? If you don't take me this year, don't expect me to go voluntarily later because I'd rather go to jail than be drafted later at an older age," I said.

After listening to my pleas and threats he said he would do everything possible to help me. So on April 22, 1962 I was ordered to go to Blagoevgrad and report to the Military District Administration

office where I was inducted in the Petrich Military, Unit number 1640, and placed under the command of Georgi Ianakiev.

This gave me an opportunity to again, without problems, renew my relationship with Velichka who I got to see practically every night. Velichka had left her husband in Sofia before she came back to Petrich. But all was not well. During one of our visits Velichka complained to me that, according to one of her neighbours, my mother had said that she did not want her as a daughter-in-law because she was divorced. That hurt me a lot. How could my modest mother say such things? The next morning I went to see her and told her that: "I will live with whom I want and you have no right to speak about Velichka that way, especially with her neighbours!"

My mother said nothing; perhaps there was no need to say anything because she knew that soon, in May of 1962, I would be transferred, for some time, to a military unit in the village Mitino, Petrich Region.

One day a few of us work soldiers went for a swim in the Struma River. The river was swollen with water but a young man named Sergei and I wagered that we could make it across the turbulent river, so we plunged in. After struggling for a while I managed to stay afloat and advanced about 50 metres into the strong flow at which point I turned around to see how Sergei was doing, but he was not there. As I looked around I saw the men on the coast waving at me, telling me to turn back. I decided to reverse my direction and started swimming back with all my strength against the strong current. The harder I fought the further away the current pulled me and I could see that the river was widening. In time and with every stroke I began to lose confidence in my ability to fight the water and began to yell for help. It was not long after that that I lost all my strength. I tried to sink to the bottom to rest but the bottom was too deep. Then with my last ounce of strength I began to swim upstream towards the coast, which was about 40 metres away.

At that point I noticed that three or four of the soldiers had jumped into the river and were waiting for me. Again I tried to touch the bottom of the river and again the bottom was too deep. I pushed hard towards the coast with my last ounce of strength and at that critical moment when I thought that the river was going to swallow me, I stopped struggling and put my feet down. Lucky for me the place was shallow and my feet touched ground. I quickly stood up and emerged chest deep out of the water. If I had had to swim, even for a few more seconds, I am sure that I would have drowned. At this point the coast was only about 15 metres away so as I struggled to walk towards it I caught a tree root and held myself there until the soldiers came and pulled me out.

I survived my episode and there would be plenty more life in me to live and suffer. But had the soldiers not warned me in time, I am sure I would have been before Saint Peter in the other world... I was alive but not without punishment. When the Unit Commander found out, the next day when we were in line he asked me to step forward so everyone could see who I was and to teach me a lesson.

“Stoian Georgiev, take three steps forward in front of the line!” ordered Captain Ianakiev. “Yes, Captain, Sir!” I said and stepped three steps forward. “Look at your fellow soldier! Look at this young and handsome man! Yesterday he almost drowned and left a spot on the good record of our unit. Therefore he deserves the most severe of punishments, he deserves to go to jail!” declared my commanding officer.

The Captain said enough things in an arrogant tone of voice and finally turned to me and said: “You revolting Macedonian you don’t deserve to breathe the air in Bulgaria!”

I did not like what he said last so I said: “Comrade Commander this is Macedonia and you don’t deserve to breathe its air!”

My reply made him furious and he said: “March, 5 days in jail! I will send you to court, you disgusting man!”

I spent five days in jail. And as I found out later, he really tried to send me to court but my parents made an appeal to Kolio Kiuchotok, a cousin of my father’s, who was married to Ianakiev’s sister-in-law. Kiuchotok advised Ianakiev not to do it.

Having family ties did help my situation this time; I am sure I would have been sent to jail had I been tried. After that I was transferred out of Unit 1640 - Petrich and sent to serve with Unit 3416 in a place called “Ilinka Reka”, three kilometres away from the Rila Monastery. Being sent far away from Petrich I was now again separated from Velichka, my first love.

Three months later when I returned to Petrich on leave, I found out that Velichka had married a divorced man from Sofia who lived with his five-year old child.

I had to spend two winters in the “Ilinka Reka” facilities. We were building a road leading to the mountain lodge “Macedonia” and I worked as an explosives technician. I drilled holes in the rocks with a pneumatic drill and then stuffed them with explosives and blew them up.

I spent the summer of 1963 in an army camp in a place called “Tursko Parche”. One day the artist assigned to the Blagoevgrad battalion came to visit us in order to compose some slogans. I noticed that he had a nice magazine which had a photograph of a beautiful landscape. He seemed like a good-natured person so I asked him if I

could borrow the magazine in order to paint the landscape. He agreed and loaned it to me. In about two and a half hours I had the landscape painted on a 180 by 140 cm canvas. It was a true classic image. The artist was impressed and asked me if I had finished art academy. The painting was hung on the walls of the Unit's dining room for everyone to admire.

At the end of 1963 we were transferred to the city Bobov Dol. I completed my military service on April 22, 1964, after which I returned home. A week later I went to visit my old unit at "Ilinska Reka" but by then the unit had already been disbanded and the painting I had painted was gone, someone had taken it. So my oil painting is now decorating someone else's home. It was a painting of a beautiful landscape with seashore in the foreground, a fisherman fishing and a white seagull flying over his head. There was a green mountain landscape on the sides and in the background. It appears that it was not my destiny to have the painting!

A little later my father informed me that my former math teacher, Gerasim Popov was looking for me and wanted to see me. In my younger days in high school I was his pride in mathematics. The next day I went to the school "Koco Mavroliev" where he was and he greeted me with the following words:

"Stoian, you too are like me; a non-Party communist. I think you may be feeling depressed in your soul after serving in prison. I want to let you know that I was promoted and now am inspector of Mathematics in the Department of Education in Blagoevgrad. I have a job offer for you at the village Dolene, should you want it. You will teach fifth, sixth and seventh grade elementary school mathematics. I believe it is a great offer and you should take it."

My first reaction was that I did not want to take a teaching job because I was compromised for having been in prison, but the man insisted. He convinced me that I had the right skills and the strength to be useful to the students in this mountainous village. He also said many other things that would be in my favour. After much discussion, I finally agreed and at the end of April I was already working as an undergraduate teacher in the village Dolene.

A week after I started teaching I tested the math skills of the students in the fifth, sixth and seventh grade by giving them an algebra exam. Unfortunately, I got very disappointing results! Out of the 29 students I tested in grade five, 22 got 2 out of 6. Of the 22 students I tested in grade six 17 got 2's. Of the 19 students I tested in grade seven 14 received a low grade. Many were not doing their work. Their previous teacher was the wife of the school principal. She was on

maternity leave. It appears that she did not do her job well because the students did not even know the math basics.

Since the bus from Petrich traveled to the village Dolene only twice a week on Saturday and Monday, I had to rent a place to stay in Dolene. I used my afternoons to help the children who needed extra help learning the basic rules of algebra and geometry. After two months of persistent effort, no one from the fifth or sixth grade was left behind to repeat math. Only one girl in the seventh grade had poor marks and had to repeat math. One boy I passed without deserving the 3. He later finished school for professional chauffeurs.

So my first and last job as an educator ended in June at which time Aleksandar Panev, the school principal, gave me an excellent character reference letter.

During the fall of 1964 I enrolled myself as a part-time student in the “Hristo Botev” Technical School in Sofia. Then in the spring of 1965 I got a job as a painter. After that I met my current wife Maria. Maria at the time was going to the same school for making clothes in Petrich as my youngest sister Vida. We got married in October of the same year and on December 25 our first child, a girl, was born. We named her Dimitrina, after my mother. Four years later, in 1969, our second daughter was born. We named her Elena, after my wife’s mother.

In the technical school I specialized in “Surveying and Cartography” and quickly learned how to use the surveying equipment. In the summer of 1966, when I was still a student, I completed a survey in area of the DSP "Greenhouses" in Petrich for the engineer Zdravev. My work was deemed excellent so I was given more surveys to do. In fact an entire 320 acre facility was given to me to oversee. I had 110 workers to whom every day I gave levels for stacking concrete slabs, drains etc. They also gave me an assistant to help me out, who in effect had completed the “Surveying and Cartography” course three years before.

Here, at my first facility, I met Dano Donev, Sofia RMA chief, who offered me a job to lead the Petrich to Marikostinovo and the Kula to Sandanski road construction. So I, along with two others from the village Marino Pole, measured and inspected road work all day long. This is where I met Sokrat Markilov, my future accomplice. That was in 1968. Sokrat came to work at my facility as an Assistant Bulldozer Operator who, along with other bulldozer operators, was responsible for clearing the land and leveling the area where the roads were to be built.

In April 1969 I left the Sofia RMA and I started a new job as a construction technician at the General Construction Enterprise in

Petrich. Here I was assigned to one of the largest buildings in the city, expanding the Canning Factory. After seven months the director of the company asked me to go to the village Krst in Petrich Region and complete my education. I declined his offer and left the Canning Factory and went to work as an investor in the facilities in Petrich, under the direction of Blagoevgrad Investments.

Since I had not completed the “Construction and Architecture” course, the director of the company insisted that I enroll in the Technical School and finish it. I participated in the first session of the course and wrote two exams but then I found out that even if I had finished the entire course I could not become an engineer so I decided to quit! After that I quit my investor job and went to work as a technical service manager for the “River Strumitsa Correction” section operating between the villages Kavrakirovo and Prvomai.

Here at the “River Strumitsa Correction” section, I worked with about fifty workers who transported materials by truck to and from the facility. They made protective fences in the path of the bulldozers. They delivered stones, poles and other building materials to the work site with dump trucks hired from “Avtostopanstvo” in Petrich. Responsibility for counting the number of deliveries made by the truck drivers was given to Andon Radev, a conscientious worker and a very serious man from the village Belasitsa.

One morning in the spring of 1970, I took the bus to work instead of riding my MZH 150 motorcycle. When I got off at the village Prvomai I ran into Sokrat Markilov who had also gotten off the same bus. He asked me if we could talk and I agreed. During our conversation, among other things, he mentioned that there was a Macedonian organization in the process of being formed. My reply to that was: “Anyone who embarks on the Macedonian question needs to have their head examined.”

I simply did not want to talk to him regarding this matter because I did not know him well enough to trust him. Until then he had not been part of the Macedonian movement. At that time I met with people secretly and would not talk to just anyone. Thus we parted ways without me revealing to Sokrat my true feelings towards his organization.

During the next month and a half, Sokrat waited for me at the Petrich bus station where I usually got off the bus in the evening coming back from work. On one occasion he mentioned to me that he was out of work and that he had four children to support etc.

I felt sorry for him and the next time he stopped me I said: “Tomorrow morning at 7 o’clock be at the bus station and I will give you a job at the facility where I work.” “And what will I be doing

there?" he asked, concerned. "The same thing the others are doing, working. We will figure something out," I replied.

We then parted company that evening. The next morning at 7 o'clock I found him waiting for me at the bus station. We waited a little while for the transport car arriving with workers from the village Topolnitsa and the two of us took the car to the facility. Here, after all the workers had breakfast and left to go to work, Sokrat stayed behind with me and Andon, the person I mentioned earlier who was responsible for counting the truck loads.

I said to Andon: "Listen Andon, I want you and Sokrat to work together to count truck loads. I want you to alternate days, one day you count, the next day Sokrat counts. However, I don't want people to suspect that I am paying two counters. When you are not counting loads you will be doing something else. I don't believe you will mind if I assign you to plant willow trees? All you have to do is cut green willow branches and stick them into the sandy soil near the water so that they will grow into trees. In addition to that job you can level soil with a rake here and there on the road edge where the bulldozers have left ridges. There are no norms for these jobs so you can work as much as you want, just don't give people the impression that you are not working or give them the opportunity to get us into trouble because I am paying for two counters."

"I have no problem with that; I will do as you say Comrade Chief!" replied Done.

I then turned to Sokrat and said: "I think we understand each other, right?" After that I went over to the workers who were driving stakes into the ground and knitting fences around them to hold the crushed rock.

Happy about his new situation and interested to know me better, Sokrat often invited me to visit at his place and watch television. During these visits, he introduced me to Ivan Timchev and Ilia Kochev, both from the village Kamene, Pavle and Todor from Petrich, and others. From the meeting I had with them and from generally talking to them I understood and accepted the idea that there truly was a newly formed group. I met more often with Ivan Timchev because he was more educated than the others and the two of us began to draft the Constitution and the Program for the Organization we were about to form.

In the meantime they stole a typewriter from the Sandanski Forest Industry office. Ilia Kochev's son, who worked there at the time, together with Ivan Timchev, who drove the getaway motorcycle, successfully accomplished the task of bringing a precious conspiratorial tool into our hands. My first task in using this machine was to write an

invitation letter calling on all Macedonians to join us in the fight to acquire our national rights as Macedonians in Bulgaria. The exact text of this letter can be found in the State Security Services Archives in Blagoevgrad.

I was against Sokrat's idea when he proposed that people who had served prison sentences should not be allowed to join the Organization. He felt that if those people fell into the hands of the State Security Services, the authorities would have irrefutable proof of their membership in our organization. He also assured me that the application forms were well-hidden in a safe place.

Sokrat's weakness was that he, in the worst of times during the dark years, spoke to many people about our Organization without interviewing them and without knowing how they stood. A lot of these people, to avoid getting into trouble themselves, reported this to the State Security Services. This, for example, is what happened to Kiril Boiadzhev, a medical technician. He did not report a letter he had received from our organization (addressed to him in French) to the State Security Services and as a result he was expelled from the ranks of the Communist Party and moved to a village.

During the day we went to work together and in the evening we went to Sokrat's place and worked on the Macedonian Question. One evening Sokrat said: "Stoian, I was talking to Kiro the bulldozer driver from the village Drangovo and he told me that he did not want to join the Organization." "Sokrat," I said, "I have told you so many times to be more cautious with people, it's not like you are inviting them to a wedding? You should only talk about our issues to well-scrutinized people!"

About a month later Sokrat said to me: "You know that guy Kiro, the bulldozer driver from the village Drangovo that I told you about? He now wants to join our Organization and work for Macedonia." I then said: "Look Sokrat, the only reason he wants to join our Organization now is because he has already reported you to the State Security Services because of the previous conversation you had with him. And now they have asked him to spy on us!" Sokrat got upset and said: "That can't be right! I know Kiro, he is a serious person. I know him from a long time ago!" I then said: "Sokrat, just remember my words. It will not be too long before you find out who is right and who is wrong."

And sure enough, later when the investigation had been completed I was allowed to read the file on our activities. The first report to the State Security Services was from the same Kiro from the village Drangovo. Afterwards when they put us together in the same cell in the Sofia prison, I said to Sokrat: "Read the file Sokrat and tell me who

filed the first report about our Organization?” Sokrat must have already read the file because he agreed with me without hesitation. He said: “Yes! It was him! You were right!”

Eight of us were arrested and placed in the same cell and right there and then I told them that since all of us were placed in one place before our trial, we could be sure that at least one or two of us were working for the State Security Services. And I was right about that too. Both Ivan Timchev and Todor Tsikandelov were free during the entire investigation and it would appear that they both worked for the State Security Services. That was in the beginning of 1974. Now I would like to take you back a little further, before that.

In February 1972 I left my job at the “Strumitsa River Correction” section and started a job as a professional small vehicle driver for the Petrich Taxi service. I thought that this way I would have more time to meet and talk with different people about the Macedonian question. Sure enough I did run into many people but I had no way of knowing how they felt - Macedonian or Bulgarian. I came into contact with many young men who were ready to take the difficult road in the struggle for Macedonia, but I did not ask any of them to join, not one of them found themselves in the crosshairs of the State Security Services. From my own experience I knew that if more than two people shared a secret, it was no longer a secret. That is why when I spoke about conspiratorial work, I did it only in private one on one.

I worked as a taxi driver for nearly 10 months before I quit. I did not quit because the job was difficult, on the contrary. While I was behind the wheel it felt like I was not working at all. It felt like I was on a pleasure trip. It was something else that made me leave. In my capacity as taxi driver, I was a relief driver giving six other drivers time off. But many of them when they had their weekly day off, instead of leaving their car with me, they would take it to have it serviced and I would be left without a car. This happened two or three times a week during which time I had no work. When Ivan Denev and Nikola Zlatnov took their days off, my work was guaranteed, but not when the others took their days off. So towards the end of December 1972 I filed a release request with the Director of DAP – Petrich and, according to Article 29, letter "a" - by mutual agreement, I was released from my duty as a taxi driver. In the meantime I applied to the “Communal Market” firm in Petrich as a contract painter and got the job.

When I negotiated my pay with Ivan Karavanov, director of the company, he agreed to pay me 130 leva per month if I could prove to him that I had 10 years working experience. I accepted his condition. I started work immediately but soon afterwards I was temporarily sent to the town Razlog. Our painters there were working at the National Fiber

and Cardboard Facility, a great big structure. There I found many good Macedonians – colleagues. Included among them were: Ivan Mekushin, Georgi Pankov and Veselin Paliushev. In 1956 Veselin and I had spread leaflets in the Petrich vicinity.

When I returned to Petrich at the end of the month I was paid only 120 leva. I immediately went to the Director's office because I wanted to know why he had paid me only 120 leva when he had agreed to pay me 130? I knocked on the door and when I heard "Yes" I went inside and asked: "Can we talk?" "Yes!" he said.

"Comrade Director, You promised me a salary of 130 leva if I proved to you that I had 10 years working experience. I provided you with a Workers' log book which proved that. Why then did you authorize only 120 leva?" I asked. "But you failed to mention that you were in prison regarding the Macedonian question!" he retorted unceremoniously.

"What does my prison sentence have to do with my work? I have already paid my dues to society. Do I not deserve to live? Do I now not need to work? I have a family to support you know!" I replied.

"Yes you do have all those rights, but had I known you were in prison ahead of time, especially regarding the Macedonian question, I wouldn't have hired you at all," he said.

Disappointed with the whole situation I said sharply: "Sorry to have bothered you. I will no longer bore you with my presence, Comrade Director. I will submit my resignation immediately!" I took a piece of paper and then wrote out my resignation. So after only a month of working at this job, I now found myself out of work again.

This was the fate that I was delivered for meddling in the Macedonian question and for having gone to jail for it. A while later I went to Razlog and took on a job as a technical manager at a brand new, not yet operating, KCK "Transfer station" located at the railway station in the city Simitli. Since I was in charge of hiring workers, I hired some from Petrich with whom I traveled by bus every working day for the next nine months. Then one fateful day on November 5, 1973 I was detained by the State Security Service.

I was arrested in KCK Razlog and taken by jeep to the Ministry of the Interior Regional Administration office in Razlog where I was again re-acquainted with my old nemesis from 1956, 1957: the hideous Shakin.

Naturally, the first job of the State Security Services people was to search me and put me in a cell. It is not worth repeating the conversation I had with Shakin. I spent the night in a jail cell and early in the morning the next day I was taken to the State Security Services prison in Blagoevgrad.

The duty officer there searched me again in accordance with prison rules and took me to a cell where I was left until the afternoon. After lunch they took me out, handcuffed my hands behind my back and led me to a “Volga” (car) which then took me, along with two agents in civilian clothes, to the Sofia Ministry of the Interior, Fourth Regional Administration office.

The duty officer searched me just like in Razlog and Blagoevgrad, the only difference here was that I was searched after I was undressed and completely naked. The duty officer then asked me to turn around and bend over so that he could check my buttocks to make sure I was not hiding a knife. The last part of this search I found humiliating and I felt like an animal. I do not know of any other place in any civilized country where political prisoners are treated with such indignity. A man, no matter how he is, he is still a man, as Maxim Gorky proudly proclaimed.

If we consider that the Bulgarian people experienced five centuries of Ottoman slavery we should not be surprised by the application of the duty officer’s Asiatic methods. If the Bulgarians were unable to adopt anything civilized from their Asian masters they were certainly able to adopt the full measure of their barbarism and vulgarity! Or perhaps this sort of thing runs in the Bulgarian blood?

An hour after being locked up in a prison cell I was taken for questioning, led by interrogator Lieutenant Georgi Petkov. Before I was taken out of the cell, one of my two escorts pushed an alarm button which activated all the flashing lights in all the corridors. This was the signal that a prisoner was being transported and that no one from the neighboring rooms should be in the halls. Outside of my interrogator, I too was not allowed to see anyone during my three months in this prison. I felt like I was under the watchful eye of the Gestapo. The atmosphere was very dark and the place looked sinister.

Here, for the third time after sixteen years, I again met Nikola Mitev my former interrogator. He was now a colonel and promoted to chief of administration. His hair was going grey, I guess from old age and worries. He was smiling and polite to me despite his past unruly behaviour and uncivilized acts towards me. But that was a long time ago; the details of those acts have been forgotten, now he seemed more charitable. The moment he entered the room he stood there looking at me with amazement. I guess he wanted to cast his eyes on his old “client” one more time.

“Welcome Stoian, how are you?” he greeted me kindly. “I am fine,” I replied “Thank you for your concern.” “Again Stoian, again with that damned Macedonian question?” he asked with a disappointing tone in his voice. “Well, what else can I do, Comrade Mitev. Someone

has to pay the price!” I replied. “That’s not right!” he said “But then what you do is your business!” After that he said: “Be honest with your Interrogator Comrade Petkov because he is looking for honesty. You know how these things work,” and then he left the room.

As soon as we were left alone the lieutenant began with the obligatory questions such as my name, my place of birth, my address, where I work etc. He asked, I answered and he typed up the details of our conversation on his typewriter with his fast moving fingers. He was doing very well with both asking the questions and typing the answers. His simultaneous use of the machine and inquisitional abilities were exemplary. It was by no accident that he conducted the interrogation with such efficiency. He had probably had years of practice on the many people that he had interrogated. Some interrogators got their practice by doing field work, going down there to Macedonia, taking statements from witnesses. The people who knew about the Organization but were not seriously engaged in it were questioned at their places of residence and acquitted.

They were simultaneously investigating fifteen people in Sofia, of whom seven were eventually released. Of the eight of us left, three were found guilty and sentenced to five years imprisonment, two were sentenced to four years, one to three years, one to two years and one to one year. Two others were interned for three years at the Deliorman facility. It is not worth a person’s time to write down the thousands of questions asked and the thousands of answers given, the sleepless nights thinking about the trial and about family. I was married with two small children when I was incarcerated and found my time in interrogation and prison very difficult; namely because I missed my family.

When I saw my children at the trial in Blagoevgrad, for the first time in seven months, I felt very bad. My younger child did not recognize me. When my wife said to her: “Go to your father for a while,” she turned her head away because she was afraid of me. My hair was cut short and I was wearing prison clothes, the child could not recognize me. Before I was arrested all she wanted to do was play with me. She loved to comb my hair.

Two years before that, when I was at home on Sunday’s, the two of them followed me around no matter where I went in the neighbourhood. They were so accustomed to me that when I was at home, they did not want to stay with their mother, not even for a minute. I always jokingly use to ask Lenche: “How much do you love me?” And she would say: “From the earth to the moon and from the sky to the sun!” The poor child always gave me the same answer, like she had some premonition that we would be apart for a long time.

I believe that is why at our meeting during the trial, after seven months apart, she was very disheartened. My older girl was a student in the first grade and recognized me as soon as she saw me but then she cried relentlessly. The younger one unfortunately did not recognize me and did not want to come to me. So, after seven months, I had to think hard about what my children were guilty of to be without a father for several years?! Were they somehow different from the other children who rejoiced at the presence of their fathers?

I was a bachelor during my first sentence from 1957 to 1961. I felt very bad for my parents, sisters and brother but then I knew they were safe and sound at home and they looked after each other. But now it was different. My little children needed me and I was not there for them and that made me feel very guilty. I did not want to be separated from them but it was fate. Fate doesn't always depend on us. Sometimes things are stronger than ourselves and whether we like it or not we need to follow what is preordained for us in life. Some say life is what we make it. Perhaps there is some truth to that. But when the flood takes you there is nothing you can do. You can certainly struggle to pull yourself out but then the flood will pull you right back in and take you deeper into uncertainty.

Sixteen years after those unlucky moments, I again found myself in a stronger, more powerful and bigger whirlpool and in the same dilemma as I was in before, so I ask myself: "Do I have the strength to pull myself out of the powerful torrent or do I allow it to carry me to uncertainty?" I have already survived two torrents which I allowed to carry me and I never tried to pull out of their flow. Why should it be any different this time?

I am currently sitting inside the "Iugotutun Bitola" resort in Ohrid looking at the shimmering waters of Lake Ohrid as I write down these bitter lines about my miserable unhappy life; the life of an unlucky, unhappy miserable man from Pirin Macedonia. A life, as it will be revealed in the next part of this novel, dedicated to Macedonia.

Now, let us get back to the conclusion of the trial. There was nothing particularly spectacular to remember about the trial except that they were prosecuting us for basically spreading defamatory propaganda or as they called it "endangering the security and territorial integrity of the People's Republic of Bulgaria".

This was a standard accusation for anyone who felt Macedonian or had thoughts about being a Macedonian. According to the People's Republic of Bulgaria's laws, a Macedonian is a traitor who has aims to secede territories from the Bulgarian state. There is plenty to say and much to write about that, but I think there is no need to. We all know the truth behind that story!

The most interesting thing about the trial was the pronouncement of the judgments against us by the District Court in Blagoevgrad which completely removed us from the political horizon of Pirin Macedonia. Our enemies rejoiced while our close friends cried. Then, after the completion of the trial and our meeting with our loved ones, we were put into monkey cages and taken to the prison in Sofia.

In Sofia, while we were in the Seventh division, we were distributed to various different cells. Two weeks later, with the exception of Sokrat and I, all those with minor convictions were sent to work in the prison kitchen. Some time later I was transferred to the Starozagorski county jail. My sentence, under verdict number 5/4.VI.1974, in accordance with NOHD by Article 109, paragraph 1, Article 108 and Article 20 and 54 of NC, was 4 years deprivation of freedom with a strict regime. This meant that I would only be allowed one time in two months to receive a letter, a package and 8 leva or one visit with my loved ones.

This was my second time at the Starozagorski Bastille which, besides being surrounded by an eight metre wall, was also surrounded by four rows of barbed wire, one of which sat on curved poles similar to those at the state border. I stayed here for about 2 months before I was put to work. After that they moved me to a woodworking plant where I painted furniture. I learned the job quickly and it only took me about three hours to fulfill the daily norm. The rest of the time I used to read books and study the Greek language. The last time I was in Starozagorski prison I had studied French and Turkish. Now I dedicated my time to studying Greek. I knew that knowing the language of the enemy would benefit me in my future activities. The Greeks were just like the Bulgarians, they refused to recognize the Macedonian language, nation and people.

While serving in this prison I met two of my future friends and comrades in the struggle for our survival as Macedonians in the Pirin part of Macedonia. Their names were Kiril Panchev and Iordan Kostandinov Ivanov. Iordan was sentenced to three years in prison and later in 1980, for pursuing activities regarding the Macedonian Question, he was again imprisoned for another two years.

The most difficult part about serving in Starozagorski prison was that it was very far from Petrich. My wife and children had to travel a long way to see me. The long travel was very hard on my wife. Life without me was difficult for her not only because she had to travel far to see me, but also because she had to work shift work as a seamstress in a factory. She not only had to take care of herself and the children but also had to spend money to send me packages and come to visit me. I did not save any of my correspondence from the previous sentence

but my wife was able to preserve all of our correspondences from this sentence, which serves as a record of the hard times we had to endure.

After some time, Sokrat Markilov was transferred to the Starogorski prison. Sokrat did not work so the only time we had an opportunity to talk was during our daily walks.

When I arrived here I got to know a couple of young men, Angel and Stanimir, both born in the village Gabrene, Petrich Region, located under the summit of Mount Belasitsa, near where the Bulgarian, Greek and Yugoslav borders intersect, where the Bulgarian, Greek and Yugoslav boundaries break up the living body of mother Macedonia. These two seventeen year olds fled to Greece, but Stanimir returned to the village a little later. Angel in the meantime crossed over into Yugoslavia and from there traveled illegally to West Germany, eventually returning to Bulgaria. For fleeing illegally, Stanimir was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and Angel to 12. People fleeing illegally were never sentenced to more than 5 years imprisonment but these two young men were also charged with “espionage”.

Stanimir however had to only serve six and a half years in prison, and Angel only 8 and a half because they were both given a pardon, something that patriotic Macedonians never get.

In the fall of 1979 the Chief of State Security for Petrich, Captain Indzhov, decided to pay the Starozagorski prison a visit. At the same time one day I was summoned to Major Nikolov’s office in the political section of the prison. There I ran into Indzhov who greeted me and told me that he wanted to talk to me about my trial that had taken place about six months ago. “Stoian, we need to talk about the other participants in your conspiracy,” he said. “The trial is over, everything that needed to be done is done, Citizen Indzhov,” I replied. “No Stoian, it’s not all done, there are still others who participated in this crime. We know who they are but we just want to confirm some things with you,” he said. “I don’t know any more individuals other than those who were identified at the trial!” I replied.

“What about Ruzha the technician, citizen of Yugoslavia? Only you and another person had contacts with her,” he said. “That’s a lie, Citizen Indzhov and you know it. I am not going to be party to this and I will not allow you to manipulate me!” I replied. “Look Stoian, we know what you took from her and that you had discussions with her. We are now waiting for your confession. Besides, if you are honest and tell us everything we can free you from prison immediately. I guarantee you that,” he assured me.

“Thank for your generosity Citizen Indzhov but I am prepared to serve my four years in prison,” I replied. “You don’t need to answer right away, go back to your cell and think about it. We will bring you

back here tomorrow morning and we will talk again,” he added, after which I was escorted out of Major Nikolov’s office.

After I was taken back to my cell I thought long and hard about the case. I was not thinking about Indzhov’s offer to free me from prison, I was thinking about who could have given the State Security Services information six months later, after we had been tried?

Some time ago, before I was arrested, I often met with Ruzha; she was my colleague. We often talked about Macedonia but as far as I know I never offered her membership to join our organization or talked about anything that may be construed as conspiratorial. Only Sokrat knew about my conversations with her. But had he said something about it, even during the investigation, the matter would have been cleared during the trial. But not even a word was said about her during the trial, so it would appear that someone else had informed them about her. But who?! A question that kept me up all night!

The next morning I was again taken to Major Nikolov’s office. I again had a conversation with Captain Indzhov but I told him nothing. Unfortunately I was still puzzled as to how they got this information about my conversations with Ruzha. Most importantly, I did not give in to the temptation to accept Indzhov’s offer to be let out of jail early at the expense of someone else. I never wanted to be free at the expense and suffering of others.

So I served my second sentence honourably, without complaining, without apathy. I worked and read most of the time and hardly had enough time to even play chess. I never complained, I never thought about home, even though my wife was alone bringing up our children and worrying about where she was going to get the money to pay for fuel to heat our house in the winter, for food, or for whatever. But even if I had thought about it how was I going to help her being locked up in prison? I helped her some with the thirty leva I sent her once a month, money I earned from working. For the work I did they paid me 20% of the regular wage or a maximum of 40 leva per month.

While serving my four year sentence in prison I kept in touch with my family through letters and visits. I was freed in early spring 1976. It is interesting to note at this point that each time after my release from prison, I was offered a job to work for the State Security Services. This time it was Colonel Atanas Maznakov who offered me the job, which I categorically rejected.

“I did not become a spy when I was nineteen years old!” I said. “Why would I become one now?” And he said: “It is not spying, it is patriotism!” “I am sorry,” I said “you will have to do without my patriotism!” “Okay then, but if someone comes and tells you that there is a Macedonian Organization, you will come and tell us! Right?”

asked Maznakov. “No, I will never do that!” I replied. “Then mark my words, you will be back in jail again!” he said. “That depends on me, now doesn’t it?” I replied.

With those words I got up and left for home. We were having this conversation in front of Kosta Kirkov, a high school classmate of mine who was now a Major in the State Security Service in Petrich.

After I was released from prison I looked for work in my profession for about two and a half months. Seeing that I was unable to find anything, I asked two of my friends, Doncho and Zhivko Takov to ask Georgi Zahov, the director of “Nestandardna Oprema” in Petrich if he could hire me as a mechanic. He agreed and allowed me to take the necessary exams, which I passed. I worked there for four months until a friend informed me that the company “Iavor” in Petrich was in need of a construction technician. Their technician had been drafted into the army. I agreed. But as per Article 64, when their technician returned, two years later, I would have to vacate the position.

Here, under my leadership, we built a prefabricated warehouse, a single monolithic building with a single 200 metre long and 24 metre wide hall, the main part of a future prison.

When their technician returned the facility was ready to be covered with a roof. I again was left without work in my profession and for the next eight months I worked as a general labourer.

Four months later I got a job as an assembly technician at the “Domostritelnen Kombinat” plant in Blagoevgrad, which was responsible for manufacturing panel blocks for the “Polijani” court near the “Biblijana” factory. Soon after I started work there one of my colleagues left and I took over his job as a technical manager. Here I spent five straight years working, the longest time I had ever held one job. After that I got a job as an investment manager at the school of public nutrition in Petrich.

Before I went to the Human Dimension Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, my relationship with Angel Iankulski, the school director where I worked, who by the way was born in the same village as my great-great-grandfather Deli Georgi, was excellent. He always asked me to coffee and was glad to talk to me. But when I returned from Copenhagen, the first thing he did was express dissatisfaction with my involvement in the Macedonian cause. He said: “You either mind your job or you mind Macedonia! Not both!” So after he said that, I submitted my resignation! And since then, since August 1st, 1990 I have only worked for Macedonia!

TO COPENHAGEN AND BACK

During the Bulgarian Communist Party Plenum, held on November 10, 1989, a number of tumultuous announcements were made regarding the political changes in Bulgaria. When it was time to end the tyranny and depose the despot Todor Zhivkov. When it was time to end the failed experiments with the different types of socialism carried out over the past 35 years, a sufficient period to lead Bulgaria into its current absurd twelve billion dollar debt to the West, empty stores, total corruption in all areas of life and the introduction of a coupon system in peacetime, they “praised” and “thanked” Todor Zhivkov and thousands of his associates for their “merit”. But that was not all! The backwards steps Zhivkov and his regime took in relation to the demographic changes introduced in an attempt to “purify” the Bulgarian nation, were also deemed “very productive”; a credit to Todor Zhivkov’s efforts of which even Hitler would have been very proud.

The first thing Zhivkov and his cronies did was “baptize” the Macedonians in Bulgaria, then the Gypsies and turned them all into Bulgarians even if it was done against their will. Some time later Zhivkov changed the names of the Pomaks. He did all that by force, by intimidation and by imposing long prison sentences. After that he went after the Turks and turned them into “Islamized Bulgarians”. And all this was “accepted” by the new regime as a good thing, “essential” to Bulgaria’s progress!

I had discussions about this with Nikola Delev, an active communist from Petrich and husband to my first cousin. I said to him: “Nikola, Todor Zhivkov is going backwards with these issues, especially with the Turks!” “Why?” he asked puzzled. “Because the Turks are not Gypsies, Pomaks, or Macedonians, they have Turkey, a powerful country behind them which will not stand for Bulgarian regimes experimenting with its compatriots,” I said. To my surprise he strongly objected and said: “What compatriots? They are not Turks, they are Islamized Bulgarians!”

“What kind of Islamized Bulgarians are you talking about? They are pure Turks. Have you forgotten what you were taught in school? For years, before this regime came into power, it was written in our Bulgarian history books that Turks, Bulgarians, Gypsies, Vlachs and others lived in Bulgaria and all of a sudden all these people disappeared! Where did they go? As you may recall, from the 1956 and 1965 census, these books used to also say that Macedonians lived in Bulgaria. Where did they go?” I asked.

The man did not like what I was saying, especially when I mentioned Macedonians. After all, judging from the “special” pension

he was receiving, he was an “active” fighter working for the Bulgarian establishment. After that we did not talk about the Turkish situation in Bulgaria and Bulgaria’s attempts to change the Turkish people’s names. Then, as the saying goes, “the day of reckoning came”, when on November 10, 1989 Todor Zhivkov was removed from the Bulgarian political scene. After that the entire myth of the “Islamized Bulgarians” came crashing down.

One day I decided to ask Nikola a question about his so-called “Islamized Bulgarians”. I asked: “Nikola, where did your Islamized Bulgarians go now?” The poor man did not know what to say. And what could he say in view of these stupid Bulgarian political tactics, which had forced Bulgaria into isolation from the Islamic world. On November 10, 1989 the sleeping consciousness of the entire Bulgarian nation was reanimated. Almost overnight new parties were formed and new movements organized. It felt like something new and wonderful was going to happen, but what, what kind of something and for whom?... only the future could tell!

Behind these apparent political changes, we the Macedonians also decided that the long-awaited day had come for us and that we too could perhaps say, without fear, that we are Macedonians and that the Bulgarian government would recognize us as Macedonians and allow us to have our own organizations. In our supposed new found freedom, Giorgi Solunski created the organization VMRO (independent) “Ilinden” in Sofia, while others in Pirin Macedonia created several other organizations including:

1. Committee to protect the rights of Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia;
2. Cultural and educational society “Yane Sandanski” in the village Mikrevo; and
3. Committee of the repressed Macedonians and the Macedonian question.

My old friend Iordan Kostandinov, from the city Sandanski, and I were very interested to know what kind of a person Georgi Solunski was, so one day in February we went to visit him in Sofia. After we met with him we went to his home. He lived in the attic in a small room with two wooden beds; a very poor living environment. But there was a telephone in the room! There were many books scattered all over the floor; they were all about Macedonia. He also had a Macedonian flag, the one with the lion. We talked with him for the entire day. Then after Iordan and I had left we talked about him and were convinced that he was a good Macedonian and not a vrvovist (a Macedonian supremacist in support of the Bulgarian annexation of Macedonia).

Our meeting with Georgi Solunski was on Saturday. The previous day I had visited the cultural organization “Gotse Delchev” located next door to the “Macedonia” cinema. There I ran into an old man sticking flyers on the windows. The flyers were invitations to a meeting. I asked the man: “What kind of people are attending this meeting?” He said: “Bulgarians from Macedonia!” He then asked me: “What kind are you?” “I am Macedonian!” I replied. “Where are you from?” he asked. “From Petrich, Pirin Macedonia!” I replied. “And what kind of person is this Georgi Solunski?” I asked. “Leave him alone! He wants an autonomous Macedonia!” he said.

I thanked the old man and left and went to my younger daughter’s apartment. She lived in Sofia, near the stadium “Gerena”. I was happy to know that Georgi Solunski was not a vrvhivist, so when I arrived at my daughter’s apartment at around 9 o’clock in the evening I contacted Solunski and made an appointment to see him the next day.

I got to talk to Georgi Solunski several times after that about our organization and the problems we were experiencing. Solunski’s initiative was to submit a Petition to the Bulgarian People’s Assembly and have the Macedonian people in Bulgaria and their rights recognized by the Bulgarian government.

In the evening I heard the news on Bulgarian television and found out that VMRO (independent) “Ilinden” was going to submit a petition to the National Assembly the next day. I was delighted by the good news and all night I kept wondering what would happen the next morning at Sofia square.

At ten o’clock in the morning the next day when I arrived in the square there was a crowd of supporters in front of the National House of Culture. But close to us there was also a gathering of vrvhivist supporters with intent to derail the handover of the petition. The vrvhovists had come prepared with anti-Macedonian slogans. If it wasn’t for the Bulgarian police, who remained neutral during the entire demonstration, we would have had a violent physical confrontation on our hands. PT Skopje television was witness to this; it filmed the entire episode.

At eleven o’clock we went to the National Assembly. We were followed by the vrvhovists all the way with booing and whistling but we marched peacefully and dignified all the way to Parliament while chanting the word “Macedonia”!, which for most of us was the very essence of our lives.

The next few days, thanks to television footage from TV Skopje, the Macedonian people from the three parts of Macedonia and from around the world had the opportunity to become acquainted with this historic event.

On Saturday April 14, 1990 at about eight o'clock in the morning, the leaders of the aforementioned Pirin Macedonian organizations gathered together in Sandanski City to jointly coordinate our Macedonian struggle. Our first priority was to create a new joint organization. After much discussion and debate, it was decided that the name of the new organization would be: United Macedonian Organization "Ilinden" or OMO "Ilinden". After that we discussed the Articles of the Organization's Constitution and the Program which we eventually adopted. Following is the Organization's Constitution:

CONSTITUTION

Of the United Macedonian Organization “Ilinden” (OMO “Ilinden”) in Pirin Macedonia

Article 1

OMO “Ilinden” aims to unite all Macedonians, citizens of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, on cultural grounds.

Article 2

In accordance with Article 19 of the Helsinki Declaration of Human Rights and Article 52 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, OMO “Ilinden” will seek to recognize the rights of Macedonians in Bulgaria.

Article 3

OMO “Ilinden” will establish itself as follows;

- a) Branches of OMO “Ilinden” will be set up in every village;
- b) Each Branch will be led by a local leadership body;
- c) OMO “Ilinden” at its highest levels will be guided by a Coordinating Committee based in the city Blagoevgrad.

Article 4

Anyone can become a member of OMO “Ilinden”, regardless of gender, language, religion, party affiliation, or social status, provided the person is not compromised by dishonesty and immorality.

Article 5

A person can become a member of OMO “Ilinden” by submitting an application to their local branch.

Article 6

Any members who violate the Constitution of the Organization will be expelled.

Article 7

OMO “Ilinden” is a voluntary organization. Members can leave of their own will.

Article 8

OMO “Ilinden” will not violate the territorial integrity of the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

Article 9

OMO “Ilinden” will not be involved in violent, brutal, inhumane and illegal acts in order to achieve its goals.

Article 10

OMO “Ilinden” is against any kind of separatism, nationalism, chauvinism, assimilation and genocide.

Article 11

OMO “Ilinden” will support the right to self-determination of every person, regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation.

Article 12

Members of OMO “Ilinden” are obliged to help each other like brothers.

Article 13

The organization will assist morally and materially all its members who are destitute (repressed or improperly removed from their job).

Article 14

To the outside world, OMO “Ilinden” will be represented by its Governing Body: President, Secretary and Speaker.

Article 15

The Coordinating Council will consist of 11 members, including: President, Vice President, Secretary, Chief Coordinator and Speaker.

Article 16

The Coordinating Council will be elected by majority vote for a period of one year.

Article 17

OMO “Ilinden” will hold a Congress once every year on August 2 – on Ilinden, the day in 1903 when the Macedonian Uprising against the Ottomans took place.

Article 18

The highest governing body of all OMO “Ilinden” activities will be the Congress. The Coordinating Council will be accountable to the Congress. The Congress will elect the Coordinating Council and assign a position to each member.

Article 19

OMO “Ilinden” will be financed by membership fees, voluntary contributions etc... and by other means in accordance with the laws of the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

Article 20

OMO “Ilinden” will have its own bank account inside the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

PROGRAM

Of the United Macedonian Organization “Ilinden” (OMO “Ilinden”).

1. OMO “Ilinden” will popularize Macedonian history and culture and make it known to the entire world.
2. OMO “Ilinden” will protect Macedonia’s history, culture and traditions through propaganda, education and science.
3. OMO “Ilinden” will provide a free forum to express alternative views on Macedonia’s social and political development.
4. OMO “Ilinden” will maintain close links with organized Macedonians living abroad.
5. OMO “Ilinden” will cooperate with all organizations, associations, unions, political parties, state institutions, governments and others who are prepared to have dialog on equal terms.
6. OMO “Ilinden” will attend official celebrations of events and personalities.
7. OMO “Ilinden” will generate propaganda about itself and prepare it for mass distribution by any means possible.
8. OMO “Ilinden” will liaise with all cultural institutions and invite lecturers to give presentations on the history of Macedonia and the Macedonian people.
9. OMO “Ilinden” will have its own emblem and seal.
10. OMO “Ilinden” will work to help the Bulgarian state through economic, spiritual, environmental and social crises.
11. OMO “Ilinden” will liaise with all religious sects in the country and abroad.

So, this is OMO “Ilinden’s” Constitution and Program. As everyone can see there is no information that suggests, even in the slightest, that there are violations of the territorial integrity of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria. Why then do they call us separatists, traitors, emissaries of Skopje, agents of Belgrade and so on?!

Shortly after OMO “Ilinden” was created we decided to partake in the 1990 annual celebration of Yane Sandanski’s tragic death. This was our crucial test and it happened to take place on the 75th anniversary of Yane Sandanski’s death; a man who the Macedonian people deservedly called “Pirin Tsar” and the Turkish Sultan called “Sandan Pasha”.

Yane Sandanski was one of the longest lasting fighters of the Macedonian uprising against the Ottomans. He fought for eighteen long years. He was a true son of Mother Macedonia. He never surrendered his weapons; he never stopped fighting for an autonomous Macedonia and he fought against foreign propaganda originating from Bulgaria,

Serbia and Greece. He disliked the Balkan governments, but mostly he disliked the Bulgarian government.

Several assassination attempts were made on Sandanski's life, mostly by paid assassins paid by the Bulgarian government, including one in Solun and one in Sofia.

At the end, on April 22, 1915, Macedonia's enemies rejoiced. A number of mercenaries ambushed Sandanski in the dense forests in Pirin Mountain. He was alone but this son of Macedonia, born in the village Vlahi in Pirin Macedonia, fought fiercely and gallantly in this uneven struggle, until he was mortally wounded. The entire Macedonian Nation from all over Pirin Macedonia grieved for him and showed its respects, a sign of love and reverence. A magnificent funeral was held for him at the Rozhen monastery near the church he had built himself.

Also, as a sign of immense respect and deep admiration for the work and sacrifices of this immortal son of Mother Macedonia, we the members and supporters of OMO "Ilinden", organized and carried out a glorious celebration in his honour.

Unfortunately we had to go through many great obstacles and endure much physical and psychological stress, in order to pay our respects and show the whole world that Yane Sandanski still has followers in Pirin Macedonia and that a Macedonian nation exists and that Macedonian people live in Bulgaria today.

The official Bulgarian government banned OMO "Ilinden" from gathering and from paying its respects to Sandanski but granted the vrhovists permission to do the same the day before on April 21st! The vrhovists were also provided with free transportation from Petrich, Gotse Delchev, Sofia and other places, for the sole purpose of attending the celebration and in hopes of attracting a larger crowd. On top of that, music bands and famous entertainers were hired to perform, even Bishop Pimen from Nevrokop was asked to attend, but in the end the vrhovist celebration turned out to be a flop. Despite all they had done they still failed to bring the thousands of people they were expecting.

How ironic that the descendents of those who brutally murdered Yane Sandanski 75 years before now came to bow before him and pay their respects, a man who they hated for everything that he stood for. What irony of fate it is that they, the enemies of the Macedonian people, would now come and shed crocodile tears at a man's grave whom for generations they despised! But there are true Macedonian people in Pirin Macedonia, people who are still alive and well and know that Yane Sandanski would want them to honour him properly and candidly!

The proof of this can be found on April 22, 1990 when, despite all odds, 10,000 true Macedonians rose to the occasion and gathered at Rozhen Monastery and properly paid their respects to the great Macedonian son. Despite being banned, despite their transportation being seized and despite all other obstacles placed before them, the true Macedonians came and did what they intended to do, properly honour Sandanski. OMO "Ilinden" organizers had prepaid for bus transportation from Petrich, Sandanski, Blagoevgrad, Mikrevo, Kresna etc. to take the people to Rozhen Monastery, but the Bulgarian authorities refused to allow the buses to leave the depots!

But all this did not dampen the spirits and enthusiasm of the participants!

Many found other forms of transportation and came to the event. They came to be part of not only the celebration but of the newly formed all Macedonian OMO "Ilinden" organization of which they had heard so much!

In spite of all the risks and chances that they took, our brave patriotic Macedonian organizers and speakers from Blagoevgrad and Sandanski were able to put on an amazing historic show for the 10,000 supporters of OMO "Ilinden". But before the celebration began, when a few members from the OMO "Ilinden" Coordinating Council were gathered on stage deciding the agenda, the Sandanski Prosecutor came on stage and asked: "Which one of you is Stoian Georgiev?" Without any hesitation I said: "I am Stoian Georgiev! Who are you and what do you want?" He then said: "I am the Sandanski Municipality Prosecutor and as you know you are forbidden from having this celebration!"

"No we are not!" I replied. "We sent you a letter and informed you that today April 22, 1990 we would be holding a celebration here at the "Rozhenski Monastery" locality in honour of the 75th anniversary of Yane Sandanski's tragic death." "Yeah, I got your letter and I answered it. My answer was that we do not approve of your celebration!" he exclaimed. "But we did not receive such a response!" I replied. And that was the truth. "Well then, I am informing you right now!" he said.

I looked around for a moment and with my hand I pointed to the crowd and said: "Do you see the large crowd gathering? That crowd came here to hear what we have to say. They didn't come here to listen to you, Mr. Prosecutor!" "Know that you will bear full responsibility for all the consequences of this!" he said. "Yes, I will take full responsibility!" I replied conclusively and harshly.

With those words the prosecutor turned away and slowly came down off the stage while witnessing first hand a real Macedonian celebration, honouring the proud king of Pirin. At the same time all around us the place was buzzing with MVR agents and servants of the

state in civilian clothes watching and listening, waiting to see and hear what would happen.

Five papers were read on stage about Sandanski's legendary life and contributions. The "Miss Stone" affair in the early twentieth century brought Sandanski and Macedonia into the limelight all around the world. The speakers who, for two long hours, addressed the audience about the historical injustices of Europe, which in 1913 partitioned Macedonia into three parts, were greeted with tumultuous applause.

I read a paper on contemporary Bulgarian Party practices regarding the Macedonian Question, which was later published in the magazine "21" - Skopje, under the title "The Proud Voice of Pirin" Here is what I said:

"Thank God, we lived to see the time finally come on November 10, 1989 when we conscientiously witnessed a BKP and SDS rally, in the "Macedonia" square in Blagoevgrad. Finally a single direction from otherwise mutually exclusive parties.

We have yet to see their burning passion, anger and bitterness. In as much as SDS is threatening that the "Romanian Timisoara" will be repeated on the Bulgarian scene it still chants "Down BKP", "BKP - Mafia!", "Death!" etc. And the Communists say, "We won with blood - with blood we will give up"!

This unfortunate Balkan Nation (Bulgaria) is still familiar with the pain of its most recent history. A party here can only come to power with a coup, only after the spilling of fraternal blood. Almost all revolutions have been carried out by hired killers. And hired killers, naturally, used to be found among the Macedonian immigrants in Bulgaria. But that's another topic. Now we are talking about unity, the unity of the conflicting BKP and SDS parties. Unity built on a possible but elusive idea – great Bulgarian chauvinism. For centuries the same idea, the same thinking has been nurtured; access to the three Seas - Black, Aegean and Adriatic. Only this idea can unite BKP and SDS!

Only this kind of deceptive thinking can unite these mutually exclusive competitors. Only this kind of deranged imagination can calm Satan's wrath. What a wonderful topic it will make for some talented artist to capture this image for future generations; the demonic combat of the "farmers" over a piece of land called Macedonia. The Macedonia for which tons of ink have been used to write about and rivers of fresh young blood spilled to possess it. The very same Macedonia for which there is "no" history of its own. The Macedonia whose territory, paid with the price of thousands of victims, has given us the first Republic in the Balkans – the Krusevo Republic!

The very same Macedonia which gave birth and raised such Macedonian National Revolutionary giants as Gotse Delchev, Damian Gruev, Yane Sandanski and others. That same Macedonia on whose territory the world watched all Balkan wars and tragedies unfold. The same Macedonia which gave the world the largest number of immigrants in the early twentieth century! That Macedonia and those Macedonian people with whom Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece have played politics since 1912 and are still playing politics to this day!

That Macedonia whose fate no one can predict! That Macedonia, divided between Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, a country whose sons and daughters are forced to play the role of experimental mice. And depending in which country those sons and daughters live, they can be called Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs!

Is this not an absurdity for people living in democratic and legal states that have signed the 1946 UN charter for human rights to act in this manner? Is there a world where other people are less fortunate than Macedonians? Are there any other countries divided into three parts?!

Why can't some people understand that Pirin, Vardar and Aegean Macedonia are not zoos under the patronage of Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece where the Macedonian people are experimental mice, whose rights can be broken at the will and pleasure of the Bulgarians, Serbs and Greeks? Do Macedonians have no rights?

Our Macedonian brothers and sisters in Yugoslavia fought for their freedom and created the Socialist Republic of Macedonia where one can proudly and without fear say: "I am Macedonian!"

The Macedonian language is now freely spoken in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia but in Bulgaria that same language is interpreted as a language full of Serbian words. Perhaps there are some words that have found their way into our language from the Serbian language but most of these words are "modern words" that did not exist in the past. But because today these words are not understood by the Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia, the Bulgarians interpret them as Serbian. But that is the least of our problems. The most important thing about this is that our Macedonian brothers and sisters have their own language, music; the best and most melodious music in the Balkans etc.

The situation for the Macedonians in Greece unfortunately is quite different. There our Macedonian brothers and sisters are not allowed to speak their own native language!

The Macedonian situation in Bulgaria, under the Zhivkov dynasty, was very delicate and contradictory at best. Unlike in G. Dimitrov's time when Delchev's ideals were put into practice in Pirin Macedonia and the Macedonians were allowed to study in the Macedonian

language, in Todor Zhivkov's time the Macedonians in 1965 were forced to "voluntarily" enroll in Bulgarian schools and voluntarily declare themselves Bulgarians by nationality. What an absurdity!

And now, after November 10, 1989, the most responsible members of the government and SDS claim that no Macedonians exist in Bulgaria. The same claims are also made by the representatives of the "Vardar" club and by the Association of Macedonian Cultural and Educational organizations - Sofia.

These clubs and associations were created with the blessing of the official Bulgarian government in order to undermine and circumvent the Macedonian people's right. Therefore to all this, we the inheritors of the legacy of Gotse Delchev, Dame Gruev and Yane Sandanski, declare that: "No one has the right to speak on behalf of the Macedonian people!" Certainly not they! These great Bulgarian chauvinists are protecting the cause in radically different terms from those of the autonomists. The vrhovists have a club close to the "Macedonia" cinema in Sofia, a real ministry, a paid president, secretary, workers and a policeman stationed in front of the club to protect them.

And no one has ever asked us, the thousands of repressed Macedonians or so-called "autonomists" of whom hundreds and hundreds have been incarcerated for just being Macedonians and sent to suffer in the camps and prisons of socialist Bulgaria. And what was the "worst crime" of which we were found to be guilty? Being Macedonian of course! And why hasn't anyone asked how we survived being stuck in these camps and prisons? Does anyone know how many mothers, fathers, wives and children spent their days and nights crying for their loved ones during these forty or so years while this people's regime has been in power? Does anyone know?

If anyone wants to know the real situation in Pirin Macedonia, let them look in the vaults of the State Security Service in Blagoevgrad. There they will find files on hundreds and maybe thousands of Macedonians prosecuted for "offenses" which in civilized countries would be considered exercising "human rights". Where else in the world is being "Macedonian" a punishable offense?

This is sad, truly sad for Bulgaria which pretends to be a legal and civilized state! Even sadder is the Macedonian condition in this country and in Greece where Macedonians are treated like mice in an experimental lab. But Macedonians are not mice; they are a proud people with a glorious past, a people worthy of respect, a people who want to build a future together with the Bulgarian, Greek and Yugoslav people.

If this alternative was understood and accepted by the people of these Balkan countries, if they had known about Macedonia in perpetuity they perhaps would have ceased to create scenes of bloody dramas and regarded Macedonia as a bone of contention. And this would have benefited everyone. The peoples of the Balkan countries will soon be crossing through the threshold of the 21st century as civilized European nations that make up the European family. We are only ten years away from joining the European family, then perhaps our hopes and dreams will finally come true and we from the top of Pirin will be able to say: “Bulgarian brothers, Yugoslav brothers, Greek brothers, we, the Macedonians, want to live in peace with you and with all nations in the world!”

Let us now speak the words of the immortal Gotse Delchev who said: “I understand the world solely as a field for cultural competition among nations.””

Petrich, 14.04.1990

April 22nd was a great day of celebration for all members and supporters of OMO “Ilinden” as well as the 10,000 Macedonians who attended the 75th Anniversary event. There were two television crews in attendance, one Bulgarian and a team from TV Skopje, which filmed the entire event. Thanks to these film crews, both friends and enemies of OMO “Ilinden” now had an exact record of all the statements made by the speakers.

Today, here in the Republic of Macedonia the people wept with happiness and sadness as they watched the historic Rozhen Monastery event on television. They were sad to have witnessed the suffering of their fellow brethren in Pirin Macedonia and at the same time they were filled with joy to have learned that the Macedonians had not disappeared from Pirin, Macedonia, despite the persistent and oppressive denationalization measures the Bulgarian authorities had undertaken against them!

Around 70 to 80 citizens of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia managed to make it to the Rozhen Monastery and had been fortunate to personally witness the event. Those people were truly happy to have been there and seen the 10,000 participants because up to that moment they were not even sure if a Macedonian consciousness existed in Pirin Macedonia. They were also impressed by the speeches and wept when the speakers spoke about Macedonia and its cruel fate.

Here is what a friend of mine from the Republic of Macedonia had to say about the Rozhen Monastery celebration:

“What we saw on April 22, 1990 at the Rozhen Monastery cannot be described with simple words. A person had to be there to truly appreciate what happened that day. It was truly a Pirin epic which will be remembered for many years to come and will remind future generations of what OMO “Ilinden” accomplished that day. The small group of people from the Socialist Republic of Macedonia that was present there rejoiced like children because their brothers from Pirin were alive and Macedonia and the Macedonian name - would never perish!”

Then twelve days later, May 4, 1990 marked the 87th anniversary of the heroic death of the unforgettable Gotse Delchev, the greatest of the great Macedonian heroes, the great leader of the Macedonian people.

On May 4, 1990 around 100 OMO “Ilinden” members gathered together in Blagoevgrad to light candles and lay flowers at Gotse Delchev’s monument, located in the city centre at “Macedonia” square. Here too we were accompanied by vrhovists who arrogantly and violently shouted “traitors”, “Titoists”, “servants of Skopje” and other uncivilized profanities that they carried in their anti-Macedonian arsenal.

At one of the OMO “Ilinden” Coordinating Council meetings, a three member delegation was selected to attend an official celebration of the 87th anniversary of Gotse Delchev’s death, in Skopje. So on May 3rd, 1990 Teodosei Popov, a member of the Coordination Council, Pavel Ivanov, a member of OMO “Ilinden” and I left for the Republic of Macedonia. We went by car up to Zlatarevo. My wife had come with us to take the car back. Beyond that we had made an agreement with our friends from the Yugoslav side to wait for us at the border.

We passed through Bulgarian Customs without any problems. They searched our luggage and then let us go. As expected there was a car waiting for us on the Macedonian side of the border which took us straight to Skopje and dropped us off at a hotel.

The next day, May 4th, at 10 o’clock in the morning we arrived at Gotse Delchev’s grave where I was invited to say a few words on behalf of the OMO “Ilinden” Organization. This was the first time that I spoke in front of so many people and naturally I was a bit nervous. In my speech I said that besides Alexander the Great of Macedonia there has never been a bigger, brighter and warmer personality than Gotse Delchev. His name and work, like a rosy dawn, will eternally shine and illuminate the three parts of Macedonia. I also said a few words about our struggle in the Pirin part of Macedonia which was led under very difficult conditions. I was interrupted by tumultuous applause several times. The people in attendance seemed happy because there were representatives from our organization at this important event.

In the afternoon we were taken to TV Skopje where Teodosei read the Constitution and Program of our Organization. After that we met with reporters and historians at the Macedonian Institute of National History. Our visit in Skopje went very well.

On May 5th our friends took us back to the border. Unfortunately the Bulgarian border authorities confiscated all the books we were given. They even confiscated our video cassette of the Rozhen Monastery event, given to me by the director of RTV Skopje, which to this day has not been returned to me.

The next Saturday the Coordinating Council of OMO "Ilinden" held a meeting in the city Sandanski. After a turbulent debate the members present gave our three day performance in the Republic of Macedonia a very good assessment.

After that I returned to my job at the school where I worked in the investment service and this is how I passed my days in Petrich and in Pirin Macedonia. At the same time we submitted an application to register our Organization at the District Court in Blagoevgrad.

Now I want to take you forward to May 19, 1990 when, after sleeping on the shores of beautiful Lake Doiran, I attended a meeting held at the Yugoslav-Greek border near Gevgelia. Many people had gathered there, I would estimate about forty thousand. The place even had a stage. There I was introduced to Vasil Tupurkovski, whom I recognized from seeing him on Skopje television, when he spoke at a rally on February 20, 1990, in support of the national rights of the Macedonian people in Pirin Macedonia.

In the afternoon the organizers took a break from delivering speeches and at that point gave the microphone to Dr. Vasil Tupurkovski then President of SFR Yugoslavia. Dr. Tupurkovski delivered a dismal speech during which he said he would take full responsibility for the termination of the presidential transition. His speech was accompanied by tumultuous applause from the forty thousand present.

Then when, through the loudspeakers, they announced that the gathering would be addressed by the President of OMO "Ilinden", Stoian Georgiev, thousands of our supporters and admirers welcomed me with applause.

I spoke briefly but with intonation. What I said was recorded on tape exactly as I said it, but my speech was interrupted several times by applause. When I was finished, the entire crowd chanted "Ma-ke-do-ni-a! Ma-ke-do-ni-a!!!!"

In the evening we left for Skopje. We stopped on the way so that I could call my wife and invited her to join me in Skopje. Three days

later she arrived but did not stay for long. I remained in the Republic of Macedonia until July 10 after which I left for Copenhagen.

I was invited to go to Copenhagen to join the all-Macedonian delegation there and, as a representative of OMO “Ilinden” from Pirin Macedonia, participate in the CSCE Conference on the Human Dimension.

Before I left for Copenhagen I went to Belgrade to get a visa, but without success. The Danish Embassy refused to give it to me and advised that I go to Sofia and apply there. If they wouldn't give me a visa in Belgrade I was sure that they wouldn't give me one in Sofia, it wasn't in Bulgaria's interest. So I took my chances and boarded the plane in Belgrade without a visa.

After flying for two and a half hours over a sea of clouds, we finally began to descend over Denmark, whose territory was marked by a network of water canals. We were happy to have landed at the airport in Copenhagen. The airport had a modern customs building, the type I had never seen before. It was clean and beautiful! I don't believe we have anything like it in the Balkans!

Everyone from our delegation went through customs without any difficulty except for me. They held me back because I did not have a visa. But thanks to Georgi Savov, the man who had come to get us from the airport, he was able to convince the Danish authorities to allow me entry. After forty minutes of explaining and pleading they finally stamped the visa on my passport and I was in and able to attend the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, held in the “White Centre” in Copenhagen.

The first day our delegation was led by Giorgi Dimitrovski from Skopje. The second day we were joined by two very intelligent Macedonian gentlemen from Australia, Michael Radin and Chris Popov. These gentlemen, along with the couple Mary and Traian Dimitriou from Canada, were the soul of our all-Macedonian delegation. They diplomatically led the talks with the different representatives from about 25 non-governmental delegations from the various European countries.

In the spotlight, naturally because the human rights struggle is waged in Greece and Bulgaria, were Risto Sideropoulos from Solun and myself. Risto was President of the Human Rights Movement of the Macedonians in the Aegean part of Macedonia. Risto spoke in Greek while Traian Dimitriou translated for him in English. I spoke Bulgarian and Chris Popov translated for me in English. I led my own dialog in French with the French delegation.

In the middle of the talks we had to switch tactics. In the beginning representatives of the other delegations asked us questions and we

answered them. All the diplomats got to know who we were, where we came from, what we wanted etc. And we knew nothing about them. We didn't even know if they knew that Macedonians existed and that a Macedonian nation existed. This made me want to ask questions like if they knew anything about us Macedonians before we came to the CSCE Forum in Copenhagen. So my first question was directed to the English delegation: I said: "Do any of you gentlemen know that Macedonian people exist today in the Balkans, in Bulgaria and in Greece and do you know what is happening with them?"

One of the English diplomats smiled and answered the question quite seriously: "Of course we know! We know very well that Macedonians live in Bulgaria and Greece and what has been happening to these people!"

Risto Sideropoulos had already explained how the Greeks treated the Macedonians in Greece, those living in Aegean Macedonia. I had explained about the hundreds, maybe the thousands of Macedonians sent to prison camps and prisons in "socialist" Bulgaria just because they felt like Macedonians and wanted to enjoy their national and human rights taken away from them in 1948.

I then posed the following question to the U.S. representatives: "If the Bulgarian government continues to act against the Macedonian people in the same way as it has up to now, will the Americans do something?" Here is what one of them said: "Please, take my card. If any of you are arrested for asking for your rights, call this number 202-225-1901, it belongs to the White House. We will not allow, even for an hour, anyone to lie in prison as a political prisoner."

We, from the all-Macedonian delegation, thanked Mr. Orest S. Doichak for his kind words and for pledging hope that democracy would continue to flow into the Balkans, and that the prospect for resolving the Macedonian question would not be far. At that point one of the U.S. representatives had a question for us. He asked: "How do you see the Macedonian question being solved?"

"Europe and the Balkans without borders where the Macedonian people will be the unifying link between all Balkan peoples. There is no doubt that Macedonia is the key to Balkan unity. We must fight for the spiritual unification of all the Macedonian people from all three parts of Macedonia. We must also be recognized as Macedonians and our national and human rights respected as we respect the rights of other nations and minorities," was our reply.

Almost all of our conversations with the other delegations were led by our Macedonian delegates from Canada and Australia. I best remember a conversation I had with the Bulgarian delegation headed by Georgi Dimitrov. I had a few questions I wanted them to answer.

I said: “Comrades, please answer the following questions for me;
1. Is there a Macedonian nation living in Bulgaria or not?
2. What kind of people live in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia - Bulgarian or Macedonian?
3. Will OMO “Ilinden” be registered as a legal organization or not?
4. If OMO “Ilinden” is not registered what will happen to its members?”

I was given the following answers:

“To your first question, we urge every person to alone determine if they are Bulgarian or Macedonian in accordance with their own conscience.”

To that answer I replied: “Bravo!” This complies with the human rights documents that Bulgaria has signed.

“To the question regarding the Macedonian nation, we say that we support the March 6, 1990 Declaration of the National Assembly of the People's Republic of Bulgaria which states that there exists no Macedonian nation and no Macedonian people.”

“To the question regarding the kind of people that live in SR Macedonia, from everything we have said so far we would say Bulgarians!”

“We can't tell you anything about OMO “Ilinden” and its status!”

I thanked the Bulgarian delegates for their answers and said: “Now I will give you my answer the same questions:

1. A Macedonian nation does exist. Macedonian people do live in the three parts of Macedonia, even though some people don't like to admit it. The Macedonian nation is recognized by all the countries in the world except for Bulgaria and Greece.

2. The Bulgarian mass media has repeatedly said that if a census is carried out in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia under the protection of the United Nations, 90% of the population will declare itself Bulgarian. I say that that is a big lie which the Bulgarians want us, the Macedonians living in Pirin Macedonia, to believe. Before I came to Copenhagen, I visited SR Macedonia and wherever I went I asked people: ‘Brothers, what are you? Bulgarians, Serbians, Greeks, or something else?’ and all the answers I got were the same: ‘We are Macedonians and nothing else!’ People there found it odd that I would even ask such questions!

3. You have stated many times that the Macedonians from Pirin and Vardar Macedonia are Bulgarians but why have you been silent about the supposed “Bulgarians” in Aegean Macedonia? Is this compensation for the Greeks who maintain that a Macedonian nation does not exist? So to placate the Greeks you removed the label “Bulgarians” from the people who live in that part of Macedonia! Right?

4. Since you insist on saying that no Macedonian nation and no Macedonian people exist, then ask these people sitting across from you what they are. Ask the all-Macedonian delegation members who flew thousands of miles to come here from Australia, America and Canada and those from the European countries. Ask them if they are Bulgarians or Macedonians? Here they are, sitting in front of you - go ahead, ask them!" I concluded.

Nobody said a word. Only Gotse Davidov, the engineer representing the Macedonians from Czechoslovakia said: "What in God's name do these Bulgarians want from us...?" This is how our conversation with the Bulgarian delegation ended.

On Friday, July 15 a press conference was held in the halls of the White Centre, during which our all-Macedonian delegation met with reporters. Naturally the press conference was also attended by members of the Bulgarian and Greek delegation.

I spoke to reporters first and told them about our situation as Macedonians in Bulgaria. My speech was interrupted by a professor from the Bulgarian delegation who said: "Mr. Georgiev, why didn't you come to us to the Human Rights Committee in Sofia and tell us your problems before coming here to this great forum? There, I believe we could have answered your Macedonian question."

I said to the professor: "With all due respect Professor, did you just fall from Mars? Why do you talk like that? Do you know how many people were sent to the prison camps because they simply felt Macedonian? I am one of those people, if you care to know, I am one of them! I was in prison twice, four years each time!"

I got a bit excited as I spoke in a bitter tone. Deep in my heart I felt embittered from the difficult days that I had spent in that country and by the betrayal of people like this man who tried to make light of my difficult situation. After my little outburst not a word was heard from the Bulgarian delegation.

When Risto Sideropoulos from Solun spoke to the press about the difficulties of the Macedonian people in Greece, he too was interrupted by Samaris, a Greek Professor who said: "Listen to him ladies and gentlemen, he speaks perfect Greek. He is lying to you, he is not Macedonian, he is Greek!" After someone translated for Risto in Greek what the Professor had said in English, Risto replied to him in poor Macedonian. Risto said: "How can I speak Macedonian dear Professor when in my entire life I have been learning to speak Greek? My mother and father spoke a bit of Macedonian, but they were prohibited from speaking it to me. We are prohibited from learning Macedonian. Macedonian was not taught in school and it was prohibited from being

spoken in public and in private. So how was I supposed to learn Macedonian my dear Professor?”

The Greek professor, like the Bulgarian professor had no words with which to respond. When Risto was finished talking I spoke and said:

“Ladies and gentlemen, do you see the tragedy of the wretched Macedonian people in the Balkans? Risto comes from a Macedonian family from Aegean Macedonia now in Greece and cannot speak his native Macedonian language. Not because he doesn't want to but because he is denied that opportunity by the Greek state. I come from a Macedonian family from Pirin Macedonia in Bulgaria and I too cannot speak the Macedonian language, not because I don't want to but because I am denied that opportunity by the Bulgarian state. Risto and I are brothers, we are one people; we are Macedonians! Risto and thousands like him who live in Greece want to learn Macedonian but are not allowed to, by the Greek state. I too and thousands of others like me who live in Bulgaria want to learn Macedonian but we too are not allowed by the Bulgarian state! What a wretched and torn apart people we Macedonians are! We are one and the same people, but in Bulgaria they say we are Bulgarians, in Greece they say we are Greeks and in Serbia they say we are Serbians! Perhaps civilized Europe can help these Balkan countries become a bit more civilized? Europe needs to know that if the Macedonian Question is not solved there will never be peace in the Balkans and Macedonia will forever remain the arena for bloody dramas and a bone of contention. All Balkan powers should realize that their way to Europe passes through Macedonia!” After I was done talking there was an outburst of applause from the audience at the press conference.

The Greek CSCE officials embarrassed themselves in front of the entire world when one of them attempted, several times, to secretly remove documents submitted by our delegation. Unfortunately for him and for Greece he was caught and reprimanded by the CSCE President. The story about this was printed in three different Danish newspapers.

When I returned from Copenhagen I found out that Georgi Margaritov, President of the Bulgarian vrvhivist Cultural and Educational Society “Todor Aleksandrov”, from my own town Petrich, on May 25th, 1990 had written a letter to the CSCE President in Copenhagen to inform him that I was mentally ill, that I was a self-appointed president, etc. I personally had the opportunity to read a copy of that letter, which I then filed in the archives of our Organization.

Stoian Boiadzhiev, a representative of the puppet organization the “Union of Macedonian Cultural and Educational Societies” in Sofia, wrote an article published in the “Diagol”, a Sofia based newspaper. In

the article he said: "Before leaving for Copenhagen, Stoian Georgiev spent a week in Skopje being "educated". He then traveled to Denmark with a Yugoslav visa. There, Mr. Georgiev could not answer any of the questions asked. The only thing he revealed was that he had been sent to jail twice, each time serving a four year sentence regarding the Macedonian question. But we have reliable information that proves that Georgiev was sent to prison for criminal activities. Soon we will be receiving documents from the Blagoevgrad Court which will prove to the entire world that Georgiev is a criminal."

Soon after the article was published I wrote a rebuttal to Boiadzhiev's article and sent it to the same newspaper but unfortunately it was not published. I gather because it was not in Mr. Boiadzhiev's or in Bulgaria's interest to publish it!

In my letter I wrote that a person should, above all, have a conscience and some morals not to write such nonsense and not to embarrass himself in public.

If I was in Mr. Boiadzhiev's place, after writing such a letter full of lies and hurtful things, I would have hidden in a deep hole underground where no one could find me! How could I possibly write something I had not seen, not even in a dream, about a person?! I was in Copenhagen from the 10th to the 17th of June 1990; if Mr. Boiadzhiev was truly there he was probably there after I left Copenhagen for Bulgaria. We did not meet, we did not see each other, nor did we speak on the telephone.

I think this incident deserves a bit more attention. Incidents such as this are indicative of the state of affairs in Bulgaria. They demonstrate the extent the Bulgarian government will go to discredit the Macedonian cause and to prove that the leadership of OMO "Ilinden" is without morals and that we, the Macedonian people, are nothing more than criminals! Over one hundred articles have been published in Bulgarian newspapers attacking our Organization. To this day not one of our rebuttals has been published.

One time we were invited to meet with President Zhelju Zhelev, the current President of Bulgaria. When we arrived he was not there! The five of us, all members of the OMO "Ilinden" Coordinating Council, were received by Georgi Avramov, Zhelju Zhelev's Secretary. He promised me that he would submit my article entitled "The clouds are growing thick over Pirin" for publishing in the opposition newspaper "Democracy". That too never happened. My article was never published, neither were the many letters that we sent to the National Assembly of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Following is the article that was never published:

“The clouds are growing thick over Pirin

After a rally was held in Skopje on February 20, 1990 in support of the national rights of the Macedonian people in Pirin Macedonia, many Bulgarian Party senior officials and government representatives from the People’s Republic of Bulgaria said that there were no Parties in Bulgaria with Macedonian platforms and that there was not even a single person pretending to be Macedonian. After VMRO “Ilinden” independent delivered a petition to the National Assembly of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, the newspaper “Rabotnichesko delo” published a scathing article entitled “Thirty separatists before NDK”, in which it called the people delivering the petition “traitors”.

On April 21, 1990 an article entitled “Screen for the misinformed and naïve” was published in the newspaper “Duma”. The article was signed by Professor Dr. Dobrin Michev, by Assistant Professor Stoian Germanov and by their older and more learned co-worker Anton Parvanov. Among other things here is what was written: “What new things is this fictional “Ilinden” Organization introducing? What are its “true” objectives? What are its “true” activities and who are its “actual” supporters?”

On April 23, 1990 another article was published by “Duma” entitled “Anti-Bulgarian provocation against the name and work of Yane Sandanski” in which, among other things, the following was written: “The servants of Macedonia-nizm turned the people’s gathering into their own pre-election rally.” The article ended with the following words: “As for those responsible for organizing this anti-Bulgarian rally, the full extent of the law should be applied against them!” These types of reaction and calls were not exclusive to the newspapers, many Bulgarian television stations also called for the full extent of the law to be applied against us.

We, the organizers of the (75th – Anniversary after Yane Sandanski’s tragic death) event, deem these unprovoked and unwarranted attacks against us and against our Organization as unworthy of a pluralistic and legal state such as Bulgaria which, after November 10, 1990 aspired to be the People’s Republic of Bulgaria. In this respect, we assess Bulgaria’s actions as the hallmark of totalitarianism!

To “the others” who were calling on the “Prosecutors to do their duty” we say we are not intimidated but we do feel like the clouds are growing thick over Pirin just like before a violent storm. It is not clear to us exactly what harm we have done in paying our respect to Yane Sandanski? Ours is a democratic Organization and we want to achieve our human and national rights in this country as Macedonians by

peaceful means. We have never attempted nor do we plan at any time to partition territory from the People's Republic of Bulgaria. We want to be recognized as Macedonians in this country with full rights the same way the rights of the Turks and Pomaks are recognized.

Macedonians have absolutely no rights in this country. The Bulgarian state has given permission to the Gypsies to register themselves under the Democratic Union of "Roma" and we the Macedonians are not even allowed to register a single cultural organization. As a proud Macedonian people belonging to one Macedonian nation, we are truly insulted and hurt when you call us Bulgarians here in Bulgaria and Greeks in Greece.

We, the organizers of these events are not "servants" of Macedonia-nizm, whatever that may mean! We are the descendants and followers of Gotse Delchev, Yane Sandanski, Nikola Karev, Giorche Petrov and the thousands of other known and unknown fallen Macedonian soldiers who fought in the struggle for the liberation of Macedonia. Were Gotse Delchev, Yane Sandanski, Nikola Karev, Giorche Petrov and all the others, servants of Macedonia-nizm? No! No they were not! They fought faithfully for freedom; for the freedom of the Macedonian people, but never were they servants! Not to the Bulgarians, not to the Greeks and not to the Serbians! They led a struggle of life and death against their eternal oppressors and against foreign propaganda!

Today we too are faithfully fighting for the same Macedonian cause and for the same Macedonian people as our forefathers did! If you think that Macedonians don't exist, that is your problem. For us, Macedonians do exist and they are alive and well living in the three divided parts of Macedonia and beyond. How is it a "desecration" for us, the Macedonian sons, to be the followers of Yane Sandanski and to gather at his grave?! And how do you describe what the vrhovists were doing at Sandanski's grave? How do you describe this manifestation where the descendants of those, who 75 years ago brutally killed Sandanski, now pay homage to him with crocodile tears? Is that not "desecration"? And you, the others, the professors, the lecturers, the scholars, are you any different than those vrhovists?

Was it not the associates of your idols Ivan Garvanov, Boris Sarafov, Todor Alexandrov and General Tsonched who killed Yane Sandanski, Dimo Hadzi Dimov, Taskata Serski and hundreds of other worthy sons of the Macedonian people?!

Finally, why are you so disturbed by the activities of those so-called "thirty separatists"? And why do you assume that there are only thirty?

Free transportation from Sofia, Blagoevgrad, Sandanski, Petrich etc, to Rozhen Monastery was provided by the BSP (vrhovist) organizers for the participants of the April 21, 1990 celebration and

only 1,000 people participated. But, on the other hand, even though our event was banned, our transportation obstructed and a number of other obstacles place before us we still managed to draw a bigger following.

In Petrich, one week before our celebration, ninety people paid 3.50 leva each bus fare at the bus station in order to be driven to the Rozhen Monastery on April 22, 1990. Unfortunately, by order of the City Mayor, the bus station could not make the buses available and many of our Petrich supporters and citizens were left without transportation and disappointed with the city leadership. Disappointment soon turned to anger and a large number of our stranded supporters decided to protest by blocking the bus station from 8 until 11 o'clock on April 22, 1990, not allowing buses in or out of the facility.

But despite all the bans, the gathering still took place and drew over 10 thousand citizens and supporters who gave our Organization their support. The OMO "Ilinden" Coordinating Council regrets that one of its speakers went beyond the boundary of what was appropriate, which sparked protests from the Bulgarian public.

The OMO "Ilinden" Coordinating Council would like to express its displeasure against the unfounded media attacks which targeted our organizers and our events.

For us, the way we see it, our role as Macedonians in the Balkans is to unify all Balkan people. We no longer want a border at the village Barakovo like the one we have at the village Zlatoreno. We believe in a new European borderless society where all peoples, all nations and all minorities will be afforded their rights. This is what we have been striving and struggling for, for so many years."

The Bulgarian mediums have been reporting that OMO "Ilinden" is a separatist organization. If that is true, why then have they not published our Organization's Constitution and the Program? Are they afraid that the people might find out what we truly stand for? What we truly are fighting for?

Why haven't they released the footage from the April 22, 1990 Rozhen Monastery event on Bulgarian television so that the Bulgarian people can see for themselves what really took place there? It was all recorded on video tape by the Bulgarian and Macedonian television crews. The Bulgarians have the footage and all the recordings made by both the Macedonian and Bulgarian film crews that attended the event.

OMO "Ilinden" has asked many questions and to this day it has received no answers, not from the media, not from the official Bulgarian government and not from any political party in Bulgaria. And they call this democracy? I say: "Congratulations to you and to your democracy!"

The following is one of the documents we handed out to the various delegations and participants in the CSCE Conference in Copenhagen on June 11, 1990.

HUMAN RIGHTS FOR THE MACEDONIANS

Today, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, when the Berlin Wall collapsed, when the civilized world is moving forward with a message of peace among nations, when Europe has found the answer to human rights, the Balkans are again threatened with the fear of war.

There has been no peace in the Balkans for decades, one of the reasons because the national and human rights of the Macedonian people have not been recognized. We can assure you that there will be no peace in the Balkans, as long as the rights of the Macedonian people are not recognized! We are convinced that if Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia maintain the same policy of not recognizing the Macedonian people in perpetuity, Macedonia will remain a bone of contention, an arena of bloody dramas for all the Balkan people.

Greeks claim that "Macedonians are Greeks" and that "There is no Macedonian nation". Serbs claim that "The Macedonians are Serbs" and that there are "No Macedonians". The Bulgarians have repeated thousands of times that "Macedonia is part of the western Bulgarian empire". The Bulgarians carry banners with the inscription "Moesia, Thrace, Macedonia". They have this absurd longing for access to the three Seas: the Black, the Aegean and the Adriatic; a longing which has created so many victims from all the Balkan people, but mostly from the Macedonian people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Even today, six months after Todor Zhivkov fell out of favour in Bulgaria, after democracy was embraced, after a multi-party system was adopted and after the rights of the Turks, Pomaks and Gypsies were recognized... official authorities and the newly created parties still deny the existence of the Macedonian people in Bulgaria. They say: "There are no Macedonians in Bulgaria!", they say "The population in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia is Bulgarian!" In today's Bulgaria, if someone claims to be Macedonian they will be automatically placed on the list of "unfit" and they will be persecuted to the ⁿth degree.

We, the Macedonians of OMO "Ilinden", demand that: "Our national and cultural rights, awarded to us by the Bled Agreement on August 1, 1947, when the Pirin part of Macedonia was granted cultural

autonomy, be reinstated! With these rights we were granted education in the Macedonian language and the right to study Macedonian history etc.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today Macedonia is divided into three parts. Its fate is the most tragic in Europe. The Macedonian people are the most unfortunate people in Europe.

These Macedonian people have struggled for centuries for their rights. Unfortunately they are surrounded by states with big appetites, which have always been an obstacle to the realization of their rights.

In addition to enduring Bulgaria's decades long extremely repressive policies, we the Macedonian people here in Pirin Macedonia also had to endure the loss of our basic human rights afforded to us in 1948. Being stripped of our human rights we began our long and arduous journey to regain them. In our struggle we were, and still are, cruelly persecuted by the Bulgarian government. We are persecuted because we are Macedonians and because we feel Macedonian; a natural and legitimate human right. Only because of these "feeling", thousands of us were sent to prison camps and prisons in Socialist Bulgaria.

I ask you ladies and gentlemen, is it a crime for a person to feel Macedonian? Is it a crime for a person to be Macedonian? In Greece and in Bulgaria, I am afraid to say, that even today it is a crime!

We came here, before this forum, with the belief that during the next ten years, before we cross the threshold of the twenty-first century, there will be much hope for all the nations of Europe and for the Macedonians to achieve their rights. We believe that the Balkan nations will follow the European road and will recognize the rights of all peoples, including those of the Macedonian people, because "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" as stated by Article 1 of the Human Rights Declaration.

Our Macedonian forefathers and freedom fighters from the Ilinden Era used to say that the people of the Balkans, be they Serbs, Greeks, Gypsies, Turks, Bulgarians, Albanians, or others, need to live like brothers, and for the world to be a field of cultural competition among nations (G. Delchev and Y. Sandanski).

We rightly expect that Europe will not remain indifferent to our pleas for our rights as Macedonians because Europe is responsible for our current fate.

As president of OMO "Ilinden", on behalf of all our members and supporters, I would like to ask the respected representatives of the non-governmental delegations and the Honourable President of CSCE to

demonstrate an understanding and take appropriate action to address our lifelong problem. I hope, Mr. President, we will not remain a lone voice in the wilderness!

IMPRESSIONS

My talk with my sister Elena about Macedonia

One evening when we were returning from the village Dolno Spanchevo visiting Atanas Gadzhenov – Tandzhuro, a very good friend of mine, my wife and I decided to pass by my sister Elena in Petrich. She was only a couple of kilometres out of our way. When my sister saw us coming out of the car she said: “You must have read my mind. If you hadn’t come today I was going to come and see you tomorrow.”

I could see that something was bothering her because she looked concerned so I asked her: “What’s the matter sister? What seems to be the problem? Please tell me!” “Come inside and I will tell you,” she said. Then as soon as we stepped inside she said: “Oh, Stoian, Stoian, the entire city is talking about you saying that you are back again involved in your Macedonian matters!...”

“Dear sister,” I said. “If you want to know, I never stopped being involved in Macedonian matters! The difference now is that since Bulgaria is becoming more democratic, we Macedonians are coming out and are openly working on political matters regarding Macedonia. We no longer hide; we openly announced who we are and what we are fighting for.”

“Then please tell me dear brother,” she said. “What is it that you want? You have a car, you have a house, you have a wife, you have children and you even have nephews and nieces? What more could you possibly want?”

“My dear sister,” I said. “It is not like you to talk like that. You are a woman of pension age, so please tell me why do you still go to work and breathe the poisonous fumes in the “Greenhouse Complex”? You have money so what is it that draws you there? What are you missing?”

“My dear brother,” she said. “I do have money but I go there to get some peace. If I stay home all the time with my grandchildren they will drive me crazy. I love them but I can’t take too much of them all at once.”

“Well, my dear sister, you have your justification,” I said. “Now you will get to hear mine. Yes I do have a house, a car, a wife, children and nephews and nieces and I love them all but at the same time I also love Macedonia!”

“And who is going to take Macedonia from your heart?” she asked. “No one, but if you can’t freely say ‘I am Macedonian!’ what kind of a Macedonia do I have?” I asked.

“Okay, you made your point!” she said but I could see that she was not going to give up that easily so she took a different approach. She

said: "Our mother is sick and if not for me, then give up this crusade for mother."

"My dear sister," I said. "Our mother, our father God bless his soul, our children, and our grandchildren are not going to be here forever. We are here today, we will be gone tomorrow. Macedonia on the other hand is timeless and has lasted for ages and ages." "Am I to understand that you love Macedonia more than our mother?" she asked. "Yes, my dear sister! I love Macedonia above all! A person deserves to live, suffer and die for her, for Mother Macedonia!" I replied.

When my sister realized that it was pointless trying to convince me she turned to my wife and said: "And you Maria, do you remember how much you suffered when Stoian was in prison, why don't you talk to him and convince him to abandon this crusade about Macedonia?" My wife Maria then turned to her and said: "Look Elena, he did not give up when our children were very young, don't expect him to give up now. I am not getting in his way. He can do what he wants!" "Bravo! You are both mad!" replied my sister in a disappointed tone of voice.

"My dear sister, you do know that everyone must follow the destiny that has been preordained for them, right? So please let's talk about something else. You, Natse, how are you doing in your retirement?" I asked my brother-in-law who until now had not taken part in our conversation. "I am fine, thank you for asking," he said. "But I think your sister is right. Why does it have to be you? Why does it always have to be the same people? The same people going to prison?" he added. "My dear Natse, because everyone wants to protect their own morsel and no one wants to think about the people. And do you know the fate of our people and how many sacrifices were made for our freedom?" I asked.

"Yes I know!" he said. "My own father was a freedom fighter in the Ilinden Era, I have many photos of him in arms as a fighter, but now the times are different," he added. "Perhaps you are right, but do you think that there is no need for us to participate in these times? Do you think we should passively stand on the sidelines doing nothing for our miserable Macedonian people? The Bulgarians won't even let us sing a single Macedonian song! They won't let us have a single Macedonian newspaper to read. They won't let us have any of the things the people in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia enjoy!" I replied.

"Yes you are right Stoian, it is exactly as you describe it!" he said. "But then at the same time can't you see what the Bulgarian government is doing to people like you?" he added. "Yes I see, but I also see our sleeping Macedonian consciousness. I see thousands of

people just like you and that hurts me! That's why I wrote an article entitled "Macedonians awaken!" I replied.

1990 MAKFEST Festival in Shtip

I had the opportunity and good fortune of attending one of this year's most important musical events in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia; the "1990 Makfest Shtip Festival" which took place on October 11, 12 and 13 in the House of Culture in Shtip. This was my first visit to the beautiful Macedonian city where Gotse Delchev met Damian Gruev and began to work as a teacher and as a leading revolutionary.

I was expected to leave with Ilia Stoianov on Friday, October 11 to go and pick up my wife at the border but he was busy with other urgent matters that day so our trip was moved to the next day. Ilia Stoianov was Director of the private bookstore "Vezilka" in Bitola. He was also one of the sponsors of the festival. The next day something else came up and Ilia could not make it so he sent his car with a couple of his workers to take me to the border. He said we would be leaving at 1 pm and heading directly for the Zlatorevo border. I got there half an hour late because the car that was supposed to take us there broke down near Strumitsa and I had to find another car to get me there. When I arrived at the border my wife was already there waiting for me at the Macedonian customs, where we had previously agreed to meet.

I apologized to my wife for my delay and explained my situation. We then left immediately and went to the place where I had left our friends. By the time we got there the car was fixed and we all left together for Shtip.

We arrived in front of the Cultural Centre ten minutes before the program started. Our friends only had two tickets to the festival but it was not hard to get two more, one for me and one for my wife.

I had been to the Socialist Republic of Macedonia eight times since February this year. During my visits I attended many important meetings but this was the first time that I attended a "live" music festival.

I was astonished by the scenery and décor the moment I entered the building, which was packed with many young and beautiful people. I have never been to or seen anything like this in Bulgaria.

Our brothers and sisters in Macedonia have come a long way in developing their experience in organizing such festivals. I said "live" earlier because I watched "Folkfest Balandovo 90" on television from a video cassette. That too was well done.

I particularly liked "Makfest - Stip 90" because of the international composition of performing artists and the songs that were sung exclusively in the Macedonian language. I also liked the melodies themselves, especially when they were performed by experienced

performing artists who engaged the attention of the audience and received tumultuous applause.

I particularly enjoyed the song “Zvonat, Zvonat” as sung by the talented Liupka Dimitrovska. The lyrics of that song were strong and sensitive, ringing like a “bell” for all Macedonians everywhere in the world. Listening to it, I thought the song was “ringing” for all the divided Macedonians everywhere.

All throughout the song my wife Maria shed tears uncontrollably. It seemed like she was reflecting on the years 1973 to 1976 when we were apart, separated by my jail sentence, her having to worry about our two children and me locked up in Starozagorski Prison behind steel bars unable to help her. Or perhaps she was crying because at any moment the Bulgarian authorities would not hesitate to separate us again for God knows how long!

And how beautifully that wonderful Liupka sang: “Barem da se javeshe, barem nadesh da mi dadashe, jas pak bi plachela, jas pak bi te dobro chekala”... The song brought tears to my eyes because my heart has been filled with pain and I too felt the pain of separation from my family.

But such is the fate of the Macedonian people! To be separated their whole lives and to shed tears. Oh, mother, mother, Macedonia! How much I want you! How much I love you! Mother Macedonia, I suffer for you and for your miserable torn apart Macedonian people! That is why I believe there is no other country in the world about whom so many songs are written and sung.

Around 11pm the same evening during cocktail hour, held in honour of the winners of “Makfest – Stip”, two beautiful women, around the age of forty-three or forty-four years old, came over to our table. They said that they recognized me from seeing me on television and wanted to talk to me in person. I promised that I would see them on Sunday, October 14th at 10 o’clock in the morning. I asked them to come and see me at the hotel where we could talk longer and uninterrupted.

Later, as per our agreement, the lovely Liubica and her husband Pance Nastev were kind enough to come and visit with us. Unfortunately Panche had to go because he had other guests to attend to. He apologized and went but he left Liubica, that wonderful woman from Shtip, to keep us company. Panche is very lucky to have such a kind and wonderful wife. I have never met such an outspoken, knowledgeable and sensitive woman anywhere. I believe Liubica has all the goodness, all the sadness and all the humanity of all Macedonians put together.

When I told her about my life in prison and my wife's life trying to cope without me, she cried and cried as if wanting to take away all our pain and suffering. I truly believe that Liubica is the kind of dignified woman who will give her life for mother Macedonia if asked. But I hope to God she never has to!

Strong women like Liubica give us Macedonians in Pirin the courage to fight to the end for our human and national rights!

I am writing my final lines of this book here in Bitola, just one day after our happy two day experience in Shtip. My heart is beating fast like it wants to escape out of my chest. Where has the relentless energy, the "Perpetua Mobile" come from in me without me having to run, without me physically exerting myself? The thought of something sacred starts my heart beating, bouncing like crazy, so hard that I have to hold it back from escaping with both hands. Is it because a while ago I thought I would die from a heart attack? I am not saying all these things to make myself sound interesting, I am saying these things because they are true and that is the truth, the whole truth.

Generally I don't want to think about dying because I think I still owe Macedonia a great deal more. There is still plenty to pay and to sacrifice for Macedonia!