

The British Foreign Office and Macedonian National Identity, 1918-1941

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The study of the Macedonian identity has given rise to far greater controversies and debates than that of most, if not all, other nationisms in eastern Europe. This has been only in part due to the hazy past of the Slavic speaking population of Macedonia and to the lack of a continuous and separate state tradition, a trait they had in common with other "small" and "young," or so-called "non-historic," peoples in the area. Controversy has been due above all to the fact that, although it began in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Macedonian nationalism did not enjoy international acceptance or legitimacy until the Second World War, much later than was the case with other similar national movements in eastern Europe.^[1] Recent research has shown that Macedonian nationalism developed, generally speaking, similarly to that of neighboring Balkan peoples, and, in most respects, of other "small" and "young" peoples of eastern, as well as some of western, Europe. But Macedonian nationalism was belated, grew slowly and, at times, manifested confusing tendencies and orientations that were, for the most part, consequences of its protracted illegitimate status.^[2]

For a half century Macedonian nationalism existed illegally. It was recognized neither by the theocratic Ottoman state nor by the two established Orthodox churches in the empire: the Patriarchist (Greek) and, after its establishment in 1870, the Exarchist (Bulgarian). Moreover neighboring Balkan nationalists-Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian-who had already achieved independence with the aid of one or more of the Great Powers, chose to deny the existence of a separate Macedonian identity; indeed they claimed Macedonia and the Macedonians as their own. They fought for Macedonia with propaganda and force, against each other and the nascent Macedonian nationalists. A prolonged struggle culminated in 1913 with the forceful partition of Macedonia after the Second Balkan or Inter-Allied War between Bulgaria, on one side, and allied Greece and Serbia, on the other.^[3] Each of these three states consolidated their control over their respective parts of Macedonia, and throughout the inter-war years inaugurated and implemented policies intended to destroy any manifestations of Macedonian nationalism, patriotism or particularism-Consequently, until World War II, unlike the other nationalisms in the Balkans or in eastern Europe more generally, Macedonian nationalism developed with-

out the aid of legal political, church, educational or cultural institutions. Macedonian movements not only lacked any legal infrastructure, they also were without the international sympathy, cultural aid and, most importantly, benefits of open and direct diplomatic and military support accorded other Balkan nationalisms.[4] Indeed, for an entire century Macedonian nationalism, illegal at home and illegitimate internationally, waged a precarious struggle for survival against overwhelming odds: in appearance against the Turks and the Ottoman Empire before 1913 but in actual fact, both before and after that date, against the three expansionist Balkan states and their respective patrons among the Great Powers.[5]

The denial of a Macedonian identity by the neighboring Balkan states, and their irreconcilably contradictory claims, motives, justifications and rationalizations, are mirrored by the largely polemical and tendentious Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian literature on the Macedonian question.[6] But the attitudes of the individual Great Powers and the thinking, motivations and internal discussions of their foreign policy establishments have not yet been studied. In this article I will focus on the British Foreign Office and its attitude toward the Macedonian question during the inter-war years. The British Foreign Office provides a case study because Great Britain played a leading role in the area after the 1878 Treaty of San Stefano; during the inter-war years respect for national self-determination and for the rights of national minorities was, at least in theory and in official policy, the accepted and prevailing norm.

For the Macedonians the inter-war period was conditioned by the Balkan wars and the partition of their land. The peace conferences and treaties which ended the Great War, represented for many "small" and "young" nations of eastern Europe the realization of dreams of self-determination. But with some minor territorial modifications at the expense of Bulgaria, these treaties confirmed the partition of Macedonia agreed upon in the Treaty of Bucharest. For the victorious allies, especially Great Britain and France, this meant putting the Macedonian problem finally to rest. It also meant that the allies could satisfy two of their clients which were pillars of the new order in south-eastern Europe: the Kingdom of Greece and the former Kingdom of Serbia, now the dominant component in the newly created Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Yugoslavia. Even though their territorial acquisitions in Macedonia did not necessarily satisfy their maximal aspirations, official Athens and Belgrade also pretended that Macedonia and the Macedonian problem had ceased to exist. Belgrade proclaimed Vardar Macedonia to be Old Serbia and the Macedonians Old Serbians; for Athens, Aegean Macedonia became simply northern Greece and the Slavic speaking Macedonians were considered Greeks or, at best, "Slavophone" Greeks. Although Bulgaria had enjoyed the greatest influence among the Macedonians, because of its defeat in the Inter-Allied and

the Great Wars, it was accorded the smallest part, Pirin Macedonia, or the Petrich district, as it became known during the inter-war years. Unlike official Athens and Belgrade, the ruling elite in Sofia did not consider the settlement permanent; but without sympathy among the victorious Great Powers and threatened by revolutionary turmoil at home, they had to accept the settlement for the time being. In any event, the Macedonian question was not a priority for the Agrarian government of A. Stamboliski.^[7] Greece, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria all sought to destroy all signs of Macedonianism through forced deportation, so-called voluntary exchanges of populations and internal transfers of the Macedonian populations. They also implemented policies of colonization, social and economic discrimination, and forced denationalization and assimilation based on total control of the educational systems and of cultural and intellectual life as a whole.

These policies were particularly pursued with great determination in Yugoslavia and Greece. Though he approved of these policies, C. L. Blakeney, British Vice-Consul at Belgrade, wrote in 1930:

It is very well for the outsider to say that the only way the Serb could achieve this [control of Vardar Macedonia] was by terrorism and the free and general use of the big stick. This may be true, as a matter of fact one could say that it is true ...On the other hand, however, it must be admitted that the Serb had no other choice ... He had not only to deal with the brigands but also with a population who regarded him as an invader and unwelcome foreigner and from whom he had and could expect no assistance.^[8]

Ten years later, on the eve of Yugoslavia's collapse during the Second World War, it was obvious that the Serbian policies in Macedonia had failed. R.I. Campbell, British minister at Belgrade, now denounced them to Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary:

Since the occupation by Serbia in 1913 of the Macedonian districts, the Government has carried out in this area, with greater or lesser severity, a policy of suppression and assimilation. In the years following the Great War land was taken away from the inhabitants and given to Serbian colonists. Macedonians were compelled to change their names and the Government did little or nothing to assist the economic development of the country...^[9]

Athens was even more extreme than Belgrade: under the guise of "voluntary" emigration they sought to expel the entire Macedonian population. Colonel A.C. Corfe, chairman of the League of Nations Mixed Commission on Greco-Bulgarian Emigration, reported in 1923: "In the course of conversation,

Mr. Lambros [Governor General of Macedonia], actually said that the present was a good opportunity to get rid of the Bulgars [sic] who remained in this area and who had always been a source of trouble for Greece." [10] This could be achieved at least superficially: Athens made a concerted effort to eradicate any reminders of the centuries old Slav presence in Aegean Macedonia by replacing Slav Macedonian personal names and surnames, as well as place names, etc., by Greek. This policy reached its most extreme and tragic dimensions during the late 1930s under the dictatorship of General Metaxas when use of the Macedonian language was prohibited even in the privacy of the home to a people who knew Greek scarcely or not at all, and who in fact could not communicate properly in any other language but their own. [11] In 1944 Captain P.H. Evans, an agent of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) who spent eight months in western Aegean Macedonia as a British Liaison Officer (BLO) and station commander, condemned the Greek policies in a lengthy report for the Foreign Office. He described the attitude "even of educated GREEKS towards the SLAV minority" as "usually stupid, uninformed and brutal to a degree that makes one despair of any understanding ever being created between the two people." However, he also left no doubt that the Greek government's policies had failed:

It is predominantly a SLAV region not a GREEK one. The language of the home, and usually also of the fields, the village Street, and the market is MACEDONIAN, a SLAV language... The place names as given on the map are GREEK...; but the names which are mostly used - - - are - - - all Slav names. The GREEK ones are merely a bit of varnish put on by Metaxas... GREEK is regarded as almost a foreign language and the GREEKS are distrusted as something alien, even if not, in the full sense of the word, as foreigners. The obvious fact, almost too obvious to be stated, that the region is SLAV by nature and not GREEK cannot be overemphasized.[12]

Revisionist Bulgaria, where major trends in Macedonian nationalism were well entrenched in Pirin Macedonia and among the large Macedonian emigration to its capital, assumed a more ambiguous position. Sofia continued its traditional attitude towards all Macedonians, acting as their patron but claiming them to be Bulgarians. To a certain extent it left the Macedonians to do what they wanted; unlike Athens and Belgrade, it tolerated, or felt compelled to tolerate, the free use of the name "Macedonia" and an active Macedonian political and cultural life.[13] In its annual report on Bulgaria for 1922, the British Legation at Sofia referred to the Pirin region as "**the autonomous kingdom of Macedonia**" and stressed that "**Bulgarian**

sovereignty over the district - - - is purely nominal and, such as it is, is resented by the irredentist Macedonian element no less strongly than is that of the Serb-Croat-Slovene Government over the adjacent area within their frontier." [14] Indeed, it could be argued that, after the overthrow of the Stamboliski regime in June 1921, Sofia not only encouraged Macedonian discontent in all three countries but also sought to take advantage of it to further its own revisionist aims.[15] Bulgaria's revisionism split the ranks of the partitioning powers and was of great significance for the future of Macedonian nationalism. For no matter how much Greece and Yugoslavia, and their patrons among the Great Powers, especially Great Britain, pretended officially that the Macedonian question had been resolved, Bulgarian policies helped to keep it alive. [16]

More importantly still, the Macedonians, both in the large emigration in Bulgaria and at home, rejected the partition of their land and the settlement based upon it. As the British Legation at Sofia warned: "the Governments of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, if not that of Greece, are faced with practically an identical problem in the pacification and control of a district overlapping both the frontiers inhabited by a population hostile to both Governments for different reasons and determined on strengthening the hands of the opposition parties in each country." [17] Disturbing to London were calls for open resistance to foreign rule. Early in 1922 W.A.F. Erskine, the minister in Sofia, drew Lord Curzon's attention to an anonymous article in the newspaper Makedonija, purportedly from a Macedonian professor at the University of Sofia, which exhorted

the Macedonians to follow the example of the Irish, who after a bitter struggle lasting through centuries, have succeeded in gaining their autonomy. "Their country is today free. Ours, too, will be free if we remain faithful to our own traditions of struggle and if we take as our example the lives of people, who, like the Irish, have "never despaired of the force of right." [18]

To be sure, organized Macedonian activity in Aegean and Vardar Macedonia, which had declined after the bloody suppression of the Ilinden uprising of 1903 and the repeated partitions of 1912-1918, came to a virtual standstill immediately after World War I. Virtually the entire Exarchist educated elite, most Macedonian activists from Aegean Macedonia and large numbers from Vardar Macedonia had been forced to emigrate and now sought refuge in Bulgaria.[19] Furthermore, the remaining Macedonian population in Aegean Macedonia, overwhelmingly rural and lacking an educated elite, found itself after the Greek-Turkish War (1919-1922) a minority in its own land as a result of the Greek government's settlement there of large numbers of Greek

and other Christian refugees from Asia Minor.[\[20\]](#) The situation among the Macedonians in Bulgaria was only slightly more encouraging: while there were large concentrations of Exarchist educated Macedonians and Macedonian activists both in the Pirin region and in Sofia, there were deep divisions within each group. Demoralization had set in and a long process of regrouping ensued among the Macedonians there.[\[21\]](#)

Nonetheless, opposition to foreign rule existed in all three parts of Macedonia from its imposition and systematic anti-Macedonian policies only intensified it. That this discontent was considerable was clearly evident in the support given to the terrorist activities of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) in the 1920s. A popular revolutionary movement in the early twentieth century, by the mid-1920s IMRO had emerged as a terrorist organization. It virtually ruled Pirin Macedonia and was a state within the state of Bulgaria, pursuing its own self-saving ends by relying on Bulgarian reaction and Italian fascism, and allowing itself to be used by both. However, officially and very conspicuously-it promulgated the aims and the slogans of the older movement: "united autonomous or independent Macedonia" and "Macedonia for the Macedonians." IMRO conducted repeated, so-called "Komitaji," armed raids and incursions into Vardar and, to a lesser extent, into Aegean Macedonia until the military coup in Sofia of May 1934 when the new regime liquidated the organization. More than anything else, it succeeded in maintaining the Macedonian question on the international scene and, as champion of Macedonia and the Macedonians, it continued to enjoy considerable support throughout most of the 1920s.[\[22\]](#)

Widespread opposition to foreign rule is also demonstrated by the results of the first post-war elections held in Greece, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, the freest to be held during the inter-war years. Significant support in all three parts of Macedonia went to the newly formed communist parties, which also rejected the status quo and declared themselves champions of Macedonia and the Macedonians.[\[23\]](#) As Erskine reported from Sofia: "The program of the Communists, therefore, at the instigation of Moscow, was modified to a form of cooperation with the Macedonian revolutionaries - - - to stir up trouble generally - - - and to pave the way for a revolution by creating disorder."[\[24\]](#) Commenting on the election in Yugoslavia, the British minister at Sofia, R. Peel, stressed that although Serbian troops had resorted to the worst excesses in order to terrorize the inhabitants into voting for government lists, "...a large proportion of communist deputies were returned from Macedonia."[\[25\]](#) Clearly, the communist vote was, in effect, a Macedonian protest against foreign rule.[\[26\]](#) This cooperation between communists and Macedonians, dating from the end of World War I, intensified in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the Balkan communist parties, after long and heated

debates, officially recognized Macedonia as a distinct Slav nation with its own language, history and territory. The Comintern followed suit in 1934 and thus supplied the first formal international recognition of Macedonian nationalism.[\[27\]](#)

Both rightist and leftist activities-the renewal of terrorism by IMRO, led by I. Mihailov, and the association of Macedonian nationalism with international communism-led to a revival of the Macedonian question as the central issue dividing the Balkan states and hence as the major cause of instability in southeastern Europe. These activities not only represented rejections of the territorial and political terms agreed to at the Paris Peace Conference, but also were serious challenges to Great Britain, one of the architects of the treaty and its main defender throughout the inter-war years.

For some time following World War I, London refused to consider the unrest in Macedonia and, hence, the revival of the Macedonian question. A lengthy memorandum, "The Macedonian Question and Komitaji Activity," prepared by the Central Department of the Foreign Office in 1925, maintained that "While amongst the Slav intellectuals there is violent partisanship, probably the majority of Slavs - - - do not care to what nationality they belong."[\[28\]](#) DJ. Footman, the vice consul at Skopje, echoed a similar sentiment when he wrote, "I believe that 80 percent of the population merely desire a firm, just and enlightened Administration, and regard Nationalism as of minor importance." [\[29\]](#) If there was a problem, the explanation for it could be found in Bulgaria:

London blamed Sofia not only for tolerating, but for encouraging and sponsoring an organized Macedonian movement, revolutionary organizations and armed bands on its own territory.[\[30\]](#) A more sophisticated explanation for the unrest could be based on a combination of social, economic and especially administrative causes: reports from the Balkans pointed to the economic backwardness of Macedonia and to the exacerbation of its economic woes by the partition, which had destroyed traditional trade routes and markets. They further stressed the lack of government reforms and constructive policies to alleviate the prevailing condition: communications remained as primitive or non-existent as they had been before the Great War, and towns such as Bitola, Skopje and Ohrid were in a state of general decline. The peasantry appeared to be slightly better off, but "this was less the result of agrarian reform or of the government colonization policy than of the energy and initiative shown by the peasantry, who have, in many cases, bought land either individually or in corporations, from Turks or Albanians who have emigrated to Anatolia."[\[31\]](#) "Such discontent as exists springs from genuine economic distress," wrote O.C. Harvey of the Foreign Office after a visit to Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia in April 1926: "Although the peasants are said to be doing

well, the towns are dying from lack of trade. And wherever else the Serb is spending his money, he does not seem to be spending it in Macedonia. Yet this country is perhaps really the biggest problem for the Serbs." [32] Or, as R.A. Gallop, third secretary in the legation in Belgrade, put it: "What discontent there is comes from economic causes and the Government must seek palliatives. This of course will take time and cost money, but to my mind the key to the Macedonian question is now this: a prosperous Macedonia will be a contented one." [33]

But most reports to London singled out the administration as the root cause for discontent in Macedonia. The new rulers had forced on the Macedonians their own, that is foreign, administrative and legal codes "without regard to local conditions or requirements." Their manner of administration was considered even worse: [34] it was described as invariably harsh, brutal, arbitrary and totally corrupt. As Colonel Corfe wrote: "One of the Macedonian's chief grievances is against the Greek Gendarmerie and during our tour we saw many examples of the arrogant and unsatisfactory methods of the Gendarmerie, who comander from the peasants whatever food they want... One visits few villages where some of the inhabitants are not in Greek prisons, without trial..." [35] DJ. Footman described the Serbian officials in Vardar Macedonia as poorly qualified, underpaid, arbitrary and corrupt. "Officials depend for their promotions and appointment on the service they can render their political party...," he wrote. "It is therefore only natural for them to make what they can while they are in office. I regard this as the factor which will most militate against improvement in administration." [36] And, after a twelve-day motor tour in the same part of Macedonia, Major W.H. Oxley, the military attaché at Belgrade, reported:

To start with they [the Prefects] have practically unlimited power over the local inhabitants and ... I gathered that they must exercise a pretty firm control. Further, we were informed that on the whole they were corrupt and were liable to use their power either to blackmail their flock or to accept bribes from over the frontiers, in order to allow terrorists to pass through their areas... [37]

The Central Department of the Foreign Office admitted all this and more. Its lengthy review of 1930 of the Macedonian question stated:

At present Jugoslavia lacks the material out of which to create an efficient and honest civil service. This want is especially felt in the new and "foreign" provinces such as Serb-Macedonia. To make matters worse, the Yugoslav Government,... are compelled to pursue a policy of forcible assimilation, and, in order to "Serbise" the Slavs of Serb-Macedonia, must necessarily tend to

disregard those grievances of the local inhabitants which spring from the violation of their local rights and customs.[38]

Although this authoritative statement of the Foreign Office acknowledged the existence and the seriousness of the Macedonian problem, the underlying assumption was that, once the economic and administrative causes for grievance were allayed, it would be finally resolved. But while the Foreign Office endeavored to avoid dealing with the national dimension and implications of the problem until as late as 1930, by the mid-1920s its position was already being questioned and challenged by Foreign Office officials in the Balkans, and was becoming untenable. It was difficult to reconcile the use of three different terms-Slavophone Greeks, Old Serbians and Bulgarians-when referring to a people who called themselves Makedonci and spoke Macedonian or dialects of it.[39] The British could maintain their position only as long as relations between Athens and Belgrade remained friendly; and a crisis in Greek-Yugoslav relations in the mid-1920s provoked a heated debate over the national identity of the Macedonians -Although unwillingly, the Foreign Office was also drawn into this debate and was forced to consider: "Who are the Macedonian Slavs?"

Ironically, the crisis in Greek-Yugoslav relations was sparked by the conclusion of the abortive Greek-Bulgarian Minorities Protocol of 1924, which "connoted the recognition on the part of Greece that the Slavophone inhabitants of Greek Macedonia were of Bulgarian race." [40] This infuriated the Serbs and the Belgrade government broke off its alliance with Greece on 7 November 1924; [41] it also launched a press and a diplomatic campaign that Greece protect the rights of what it called the "Serbian minority" in Aegean Macedonia.[42] The Yugoslav government clamored for a special agreement with Greece similar to the abortive protocol between Bulgaria and Greece. "The object of this move is quite patent," wrote C.H. Bateman of the Foreign Office. "All that the Serbs want is that the Greeks should recognize a Serbian minority in Greek Macedonia in the same way as they recognized a Bulgarian minority in 1924." [43] In the end, even though Greece did not sign such an agreement with Yugoslavia, relations between these two countries returned to normal; but the debate concerning the national identity of the Macedonian Slavs that this crisis had instigated in the Foreign Office continued well into the 1930s.

The debate was not entirely new or confined to Britain. The national identity of the Macedonians had sparked continuous and heated controversies before the Balkan Wars and the First World War. However, the debate assumed far greater relevance and urgency after the peace settlement because all democratic governments had embraced the principle of national self-determination. This

principle was supposedly the basis for the entire settlement in east central Europe; and it supposedly bound all governments of the "New Europe" to respect the national rights of those national minorities who for one reason or another could not exercise their right to national self-determination. Hence, to a certain extent the fate of the peace settlement in this part of Europe hinged on this principle and it was thus of particular interest to Great Britain, perhaps its chief architect and defender.

Even before the Greek-Serbian dispute London had received reports that the causes for the revival of the Macedonian problem were not solely economic or administrative, but rather that they were primarily ethnic or national. While noting in its annual report on Bulgaria for 1922, that "the province known as Macedonia has, of course, no integral existence," the Chancery of the British Legation at Sofia had emphasized that as an entity it still existed "in the aspirations of men of Macedonian birth or origin scattered under the sovereignty of Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria." It also had added that Macedonia has "clearly defined geographical boundaries."[\[44\]](#) Colonel Corfe had written in 1923 that the Macedonians of Aegean Macedonia, and incidentally in the other two parts, were fearful of state officials and had nothing to say in their presence:

But in the evenings in their own houses or when we had given the officials the slip, we encouraged them to speak to us. Then we in-variably heard the same story as "Bad administration. They want to force us to become Greeks, in language, in religion, in sentiment, in every way. We have served in the Greek army and we have fought for them: now they insult us by calling us 'damned Bulgars'" ... To my question "What do you want? an autonomous Macedonia or a Macedonia under Bulgaria?" the answer was generally the same: "We want good administration. **We are Macedonians, not Greeks or Bulgars...**We want to be left in peace."[\[45\]](#)

The Greek-Serbian crisis, however, forced the Foreign Office to concentrate its attention, as never before, on the national identity of the Macedonian Slavs and, indeed, on the question: who are the Macedonians? On 30 June 1925, DJ. Footman, the British vice consul at Skopje, the administrative center of Vardar Macedonia, addressed this issue in a lengthy report for the Foreign Office. He wrote that "the majority of the inhabitants of Southern Serbia are Orthodox Christian Macedonians, ethnologically slightly nearer to the Bulgar than to the Serb.." He acknowledged that the Macedonians were better disposed toward Bulgaria than Serbia because, as he had pointed out: the Macedonians were "ethnologically" more akin to the Bulgarians than to the Serbs; because Bulgarian propaganda in Macedonia in the time of the Turks, largely carried on

through the schools, was widespread and effective; and because Macedonians at the time perceived Bulgarian culture and prestige to be higher than those of its neighbors. Moreover, large numbers of Macedonians educated in Bulgarian schools had sought refuge in Bulgaria before and especially after the partitions of 1913. "There is therefore now a large Macedonian element in Bulgaria," continued Footman, "represented in all Government Departments and occupying high positions in the army and in the civil service...." He characterized this element as "Serbophobe, [it] mostly desires the incorporation of Macedonia in Bulgaria, and generally supports the Makedonska Revolucionara [sic] Organizacija [the IMRO]." However, he also pointed to the existence of the tendency to seek an independent Macedonia with Salonica as its capital. "This movement also had adherents among the Macedonian colony in Bulgaria. It is supported by the parties of the Left in Bulgaria, and, at least theoretically, by large numbers of Macedonians."[\[46\]](#)

The Central Department of the Foreign Office went even further in clarifying the separate identity of the Macedonians. In a confidential survey and analysis of the entire Macedonian problem it identified the Macedonians not as Bulgarians, Greeks or Serbs, but rather as Macedonian Slavs, and, on the basis of "a fairly reliable estimate made in 1912," singled them out as by far the largest single ethnic group in Macedonia.[\[47\]](#) It acknowledged, as did Footman, that these Slavs spoke a language "understood by both Serbs and Bulgars, but slightly more akin to the Bulgarian tongue than to the Serbian"; and that after the 1870 establishment of the Exarchate, Bulgarian propaganda made greater inroads in Macedonia than the Serbian or Greek. However, it stressed that "While it is probable that the majority of these Slavs are, or were, pro-Bulgar, it is incorrect to refer to them as other than Macedo-Slavs. To this extent both the Serb claim that they are Southern Serbs and the Bulgarian claim that they are Bulgarians are unjustified."[\[48\]](#)

By declaring that the Macedonian Slavs were neither Bulgarians nor Serbs, the survey acknowledged implicitly that they were different from both and hence that they constituted a separate south Slav element. However, it did not go so far as to recognize them explicitly as a distinct nationality or nation. It sought to explain this omission by maintaining, without convincing evidence, that "while amongst the Slav intellectuals there is violent partisanship, probably the majority of Slavs ... do not care to what nationality they belong."[\[49\]](#) The real reason for the omission, however, lay elsewhere. In view of the prevailing acceptance of the principle of national self-determination, the recognition of the Slav Macedonians as a distinct nationality would have legitimized the Macedonian claims for autonomy or at least for national minority rights. This would have connoted the tearing up or at least the revision of the peace treaties and of the frontiers, neither of which was acceptable to Britain's clients, Greece

and Yugoslavia, or indeed, to Great Britain itself. "In all the circumstances the present partition of Macedonia is probably as good a practical arrangement as can be devised," declared the Central Department, "and there is no real reason or consideration of political expediency which could be quoted to necessitate a rearrangement of the present frontiers." [50]

Indeed, the Foreign Office was contemplating a different and, as it turned out, an illusory solution to the Macedonian problem. It accepted as valid the official Greek determination of the low number of Macedonians in Aegean Macedonia and assumed that with time they would be assimilated. [51] It also assumed that with time the Yugoslav hold on Vardar Macedonia would become more secure, that this would be followed "as a natural consequence" by the "rounding up of Macedonian agents," and that the Macedonian organization operating from Bulgaria would "suffer correspondingly through the lack of funds and general support forthcoming from that district...." And, as organized Macedonian activity declined,

the prospect of more cordiality between Bulgaria and the Serb-Slovene-Croat kingdom will become brighter, and pro tanto, the idea of Serb-Bulgar Slav confederacy will become more feasible. The formation of such a Slav State in the Balkans will settle the Macedonian question once and for all. Other considerations arising out of the formation of such a confederacy must be reserved for the future. [52]

A few months later, on 3 March 1926; C.H. Bateman, a second secretary in the Foreign Office, issued the official position in a separate "Memorandum on 'Serbian Minorities' in Greek Macedonia." In this strong statement he reiterated the main points of the Central Department's memorandum of 26 November 1925: "Most authorities are agreed that by all ethnological and language tests the Macedonian Slav is more akin to the Bulgar than to the Serb." Again, without substantiation, he declared that the deciding factor in the national allegiance of the Macedonian Slavs "is the national consciousness of the individual who changes his allegiance according to circumstances... His national allegiance is largely a matter of the propaganda which is exercised upon him...," [53] in effect, under the influence of propaganda, Bulgarian, Greek or Serbian, the Macedonian Slav would become a loyal Bulgarian, Greek or Serb. Bateman therefore sided with the Greeks in the Greek-Serbian dispute: "Taking the broadest interpretation of the Macedonian Slavs, one thing is certain, namely, that the Serbs have only the flimsiest of rights to intervene at all on their behalf. The Greeks are correct in contesting this right and contending that it is a matter that touches the internal administration of Greece." [54] If, as it appears, Bateman's aim was to put an end to the Foreign

Office debate concerning the Macedonian national question, he failed. Although the Greek-Serbian dispute came to nothing, this debate intensified. R.A. Gallop, third secretary of the Legation at Belgrade, spent a week in April 1926 in Vardar Macedonia; his report after the tour is most revealing:

The most striking thing to one familiar with North Serbia [Serbia proper], who has been accustomed to hear Macedonia described as Southern Serbia and its inhabitants as Serbs, was the complete difference of atmosphere which was noticeable almost as soon as we had crossed the pre-1913 frontier some miles south of Vranje. One felt as though one had entered a foreign country. Officials and officers from North Serbia seemed to feel this too, and I noticed especially in the cafes and hotels of Skopje that they formed groups by themselves and mixed little with the Macedo-Slavs. Those of the latter that I met were equally insistent on calling themselves neither Serbs nor Bulgars, but Macedonians.... There seemed to be no love lost for the Bulgars in most places. Their brutality during the war had lost them the affection even of those who before the Balkan War had been their friends...[\[55\]](#)

Moreover, in his response to Bateman's memorandum, Gallop defined more clearly than ever before the central issue in the Greek-Serbian dispute. He reminded Bateman that the Serbian claim is founded not on the contention that among the Slavs of Greek Macedonia there are some that can be picked as Serbs, but on the contention that the population is of exactly the same stock on both sides of the border. The Serbs see that to admit that the Macedonians in Greece are Bulgars weakens their case that the Macedonians in South Serbia are Serbs.

While he agreed with Bateman "that the Macedonian Slavs used, before the days of propaganda, to call themselves 'Christians' rather than Serbs or Bulgars," Gallop did not agree "that the Macedonian Slavs are nearer akin to the Bulgar than to the Serb." In any case, he questioned the impartiality of so-called "authorities" and emphasized the actual reality that "nowadays" the Macedonian Slavs **considered and called themselves "Makedonci."** [\[56\]](#)

Oliver C. Harvey of the Foreign Office, who visited both Vardar and Aegean Macedonia, reinforced Gallop's views. Indeed, in his "Notes" on the fact-finding mission he left no doubt about the existence of a distinct Macedonian consciousness and identity. In connection with Vardar Macedonia he reported that "The Slavophone population of Serb Macedonia definitely regard themselves as distinct from the Serbs. **If asked their nationality they say they are 'Macedonians,' and they speak the Macedonian dialect.** Nor do they identify themselves with the Bulgars, although the latter seem undoubtedly to be regarded as nearer relatives than the Serbs."[\[57\]](#) As far as Aegean

Macedonia was concerned, Harvey noted that in its eastern and central part "the Slavophone population had 'voluntarily' emigrated and their place had been taken by 500,000 Greek refugees" from Asia Minor. "'Voluntary' emigration," he observed, "is a euphemism; incoming Greeks were planted on the Slavophone villagers to such an extent that life was made unbearable for them and they were forced to emigrate." Such upheaval did not take place in its western part and large numbers of Slavophones remained there, in the area around and south of Florina (Lerin). "These of course constitute the much advertised "Serb minority," he continued. "But they are no more Serb than the Macedonians of Serbia-**they speak Macedonian, and call themselves Macedonians** and sentimentally look to Bulgaria rather than to Serbia."[\[58\]](#)

Through this internal debate, the Foreign Office appeared to have reached a virtual consensus that the Macedonian Slavs were neither Serbs, nor Bulgarians nor Greeks, a de facto acknowledgment that they comprised a separate southern Slav national group. But they were not given official recognition as a distinct nationality or nation; as I have already shown, the Foreign Office hoped to see the Macedonian problem disappear by their eventual assimilation into the three nations that ruled over them. In the meantime, during the second half of the 1920s and until its dissolution in 1934, the IMRO intensified its activities in Bulgaria and armed incursions into Vardar Macedonia, thereby reminding London of the Macedonian national question.

Unlike in Greece and Yugoslavia, in Bulgaria the various aspects of the Macedonian problem were generally argued freely and publicly. This was only partly due to the traditional Bulgarian paternalism toward the Macedonians; it also reflected the strength and influence of the organized Macedonian movement in the Pirin region, in Sofia and in other major urban centers. Consequently, British diplomats there were more deeply and broadly versed in all the intricacies of the Macedonian problem than their counterparts in Athens and Belgrade, and they were more apt to search for alternative solutions.

Early in 1928 Charles ES. Dodd, the charge d'affaires at Sofia, assured the Foreign Office that the IMRO "would at once desist from its sinister activities" "if the Yugoslav Government would grant educational and religious autonomy to Macedonia." To DJ. Footman, whose reaction from Skopje had been sought by the Foreign Office, this read "like pious hope" rather than "a practical proposition." He did not reject the idea in principle; indeed, he even used the terms "nationality" and "national minority" when referring to the Macedonians, and argued that if such autonomy had been introduced immediately after the war "the results would no doubt have been beneficial." Now, however, "it would not suffice to wipe out the bitterness felt against the Serbs"; it would no longer satisfy the entire Macedonian movement. Instead, he warned, Macedonian activists would interpret it "as a confession of failure and a sign of

weakness on the part of Serbs, to be exploited to the utmost possible extent." He considered (and the future proved him right) that "the best chance for real progress in Macedonia" was "the removal of the Serb predominance in the Yugoslav state."[\[59\]](#) The Foreign Office dismissed Dodd's suggestion and showed little appreciation of Footman's pessimistic, but rather sensitive and measured analysis of the Macedonian problem in Yugoslavia. "It is quite clear, however," wrote Orme Sargent, a counselor and a future assistant under secretary of state, "that it would be impossible to expect the Yugoslav Government to adopt measures which would recognize the population of Southern Serbia as a political minority." Inasmuch as he had convinced himself that the discontent in Macedonia was "due to economic and administrative conditions rather than psychological or racial issues," he endorsed instead a proposal made by H.W. Kennard, the minister at Belgrade, to grant financial loans to Yugoslavia to improve internal conditions "in Southern Serbia and thus help to lessen the present sullen discontent of the population." Most important, such expenditure, Sargent concluded,

would not have the appearance of being extorted from the Yugoslav Government at the point of the Macedonian bayonet, nor would it commit the Yugoslavs in any way to a recognition of the claim of a separate Macedonian nationality. Reforms on these lines could therefore be carried out at any time without loss of face by the Yugoslav Government. [\[60\]](#)

Obviously Sargent was concerned with the sensitivities and interests of the Yugoslav government and not with the demands of the Macedonians and consciously sought to minimize "the psychological and racial issues" as the basis of Macedonian discontent. This did not go unnoticed at the British Legation at Sofia: in a rather blunt and less than diplomatic manner, R.A.C. Sperling, the new minister at Sofia, accused the "Powers," meaning, of course, primarily his own government and that of France, of always unfairly taking the side of Yugoslavia against Bulgaria and the Macedonians. Or as he put it, "Yugoslavia continues flagrantly to violate the provisions of the Minorities Treaty of 1919. The Powers as well as the League of Nations accept any quibble advanced by the Yugoslav Government as a pretext for not raising the question of the Macedonian minority."[\[61\]](#)

The exchange of views provoked by Sperling's "outburst," as O. Sargent called it, is most revealing about the Foreign Office's thinking on the Macedonian national question. Howard Kennard, Sperling's counterpart at Belgrade, was so taken aback by it that he did not wish to comment on it officially. In a letter to O. Sargent, however, he expressed his "private regrets

that Sperling cannot understand that it is not a question of taking sides one way or the other, but of assisting in preserving the peace in the Balkans, which is, after all, our only political *raison d'etre* here." [62] C.H. Bateman accused Sperling of holding general views "that are not only erroneous but certainly dangerous ... His Majesty's Government has long since decided that what are nebulously called Macedonian aspirations are impossible of realization, and that to give way to Macedonian agitation would be the best way to create upheaval in the Balkans." [63] Sargent felt that Sperling's "outburst" ought not to go unnoticed; but instead of an official reprimand he proposed to send him a private letter. [64] This was approved by R.G. Vansittart, private secretary to the Prime Minister and assistant under secretary of state in the Foreign Office, who added that "the next time this sort of thing happens, he [Sperling] should have it officially." [65] Sargent's lengthy private letter was polite, but direct. He pointed out that Serbia was the signatory "of one minorities treaty," that signed at St. Germain on 20 September 1919. "In your dispatch you make mention of a Macedonian minority. But what is this minority?" he asked. "You will find no mention of it in the Yugoslav Minorities Treaty... He also reiterated the well known view of the Foreign Office that the grievances which "the population of Southern Serbia complain of are common to all and are due to the general low level of administrative ability among the local officials and not to the intentional ill treatment of any particular race, sect or language." Finally, he rejected Sperling's suggestion that some satisfaction of the "Macedonian national aspirations" might lead to a solution of the Macedonian problem. "What are we to understand by such aspirations?" asked Sargent. "If Macedonian autonomy is what is aimed at it can be said at once that it is impossible of realisation." To aim at it would be to play into the hands of Italy and other revisionist elements, and Britain was determined "to stick strenuously to the peace terms." [66]

Sperling was not deterred by the hostile reaction of his superiors. He responded to Sargent with a lengthy letter of his own in which he reduced the Macedonian problem to its bare essentials by asking bluntly two questions: "a, Is there such a thing as a Macedonian minority?" and "b, If there is, is it ill treated by the Serbs?" He then went on to answer them. "Sounds superfluous," he wrote, "but you ask 'What is the Macedonian minority?' I can hardly believe you want me to quote all the authorities from the year one to show you that there is such a thing as a Macedonian." He referred him specifically to the earlier reports by Gallop, Harvey and Footman, and stressed that the **Slav inhabitants of Macedonia called themselves neither Serbs nor Bulgarians, but Macedonians.** With regard to the second question, Sperling

argued that it made no difference to the Macedonians "whether these things were due, as you say, to the general low level of Serbian administrative ability or to the intentional ill treatment of a particular race. ... The fact remains that their charges stand..."[67]

London was not prepared to listen and, indeed, wished to put an end to the expression of views that seemed to run counter to the main tenets of Britain's policies in southeastern Europe. C.H. Bateman suggested to Sargent that "a short reply would be sufficient to point to the confusion of thought which appears to exist at our legation at Sofia on this Macedonian question."[68] Otherwise, his comments, which were drafted by Sargent into a letter to Sperling, reveal a characteristic British slighting of nationalism and national movements among the so-called "small" and "young" peoples in eastern Europe. He argued that just because the Slavs of Macedonia called themselves Macedonians, "there was no reason why We or you should consent to give them a name which coincides with a piece of territory... which has not for a thousand years been an autonomous entity in any sense..."[69] However, he could not come up with another, more acceptable name for them, except perhaps "Macedo-Slavs," which was in effect the same thing.[70]

Such intervention and arguments do not seem to have been sufficient to silence the legation at Sofia. At any rate, R.A.C. Sperling left Sofia shortly after,[71] and his successor-, Sidney P.P. Waterlow, held views on the Macedonian problem that were, if anything, even more revisionist. He expressed them most cogently in a long, thoughtful and courteous letter to R.G. Vansittart,[72] who had in the meantime become permanent under secretary of state for foreign affairs. He did not believe, as the Foreign Office did, that the Macedonian problem would simply disappear when the militant revolutionaries had been destroyed in Bulgaria and when Yugoslavia had provided the Macedonians with good administration and a civilized minority regime. Unlike Nevile Henderson, Kennard's successor as minister at Belgrade, he could not see how any amount of good administration, even if it would improve the atmosphere and facilitate the suppression of the IMRO, could be an ultimate solution. He argued that only genuine home rule-freedom to manage local affairs, churches, schools, etc.-could do that, but even here he had doubts. In any case, he seemed convinced that Belgrade was not capable of giving its Macedonian subjects anything like real local autonomy or, at least, not so long as the Macedonians considered themselves Macedonian.

It is this that dictates the present policy of intense Serbification. But it is this that makes it impossible to introduce a genuine minority regime until there is

no minority to give the regime to, and it is just this that Bulgaria, with her Macedonian exiles (the most stubborn and intelligent people in the Balkans) and her indigenous Macedonian population, can never wholeheartedly accept ...[\[73\]](#)

Thus, even if the revolutionaries were destroyed and Serbian Macedonia was ruled with "kindly wisdom," the Macedonian question would most likely remain unresolved, an apple of discord, a stumbling block to stability in the Balkans, etc. In Waterlow's search for a solution "that might bring real peace at long last," he seriously considered the idea, which seemed entirely logical to him but at the same time not altogether practical from the perspective of British foreign policy, of an autonomous united Macedonia. "I do not share the view of the department that Macedonia never having been a geographical or racial entity, the idea [an autonomous united Macedonia] is inherently absurd;" he wrote, "that is an exaggeration, inherited, I fancy, from the predominance of Serb views at the Peace Conference." He believed that, united and independent, the Macedonians "might play the part which God seems to have assigned to them in the Balkans, but which man has thwarted-that, namely, of acting as a link between their Serb and Bulgar brothers, instead of being a permanent cause of division." [\[74\]](#) He did not really expect a positive reaction to this idea from the Foreign Office; yet, as he concluded, "one's mind keeps flying back in this direction, as one goes over the problem day after day, only to find Alps upon Alps of hopelessness arise."[\[75\]](#) But when John Balfour at the Foreign Office read Waterlow's report, he did not consider this a logical idea and maintained that Britain "must continue to concentrate [on the peace treaties] in the forlorn hope that they will pierce a Simplon Tunnel through the Alps of despair."[\[76\]](#)

On the basis of this lengthy debate, which involved those in the Foreign Office and service most concerned with the Macedonian question, the Central Department drafted a new, updated memorandum on the Macedonian question in 1929.[\[77\]](#) Parts of the first version were revised shortly thereafter as a result of last minute critical comments and objections voiced by Waterlow. The final draft of this lengthy and valuable document, dated 2 July 1930, presented the official British interpretation of the history of the Macedonian question since the 1860s, as well as an analysis of the contemporary political problem.[\[78\]](#) It acknowledged once again that the Slav inhabitants of Macedonia, the Macedo-Slavs or Macedonians, were neither Serbs nor Bulgarians, and thus implicitly recognized their separate and distinct identity. It also admitted the existence in Yugoslav Macedonia of "a uniquely dangerous minority problem, which is aggravated by the fact that the Macedonians are the most stubborn and hard-headed people in the Balkans." [\[79\]](#) It was therefore deeply concerned that the

League of Nations could be dragged into the Macedonian problem, first of all, because it was a threat to international peace and, secondly and more importantly, because the Yugoslav minorities treaty, concluded at St. Germain in 1919, applied "to all territories acquired by Serbia as a result of the Balkan wars, and the enforcement of which is entrusted to the League Council."^[80] Great Britain, however, could not allow the consideration of the Macedonian question in Yugoslavia by the League of Nations, the body that was specifically delegated to deal with and arbitrate national problems, conflicts and grievances, for it would "inevitably involve the airing of the whole Macedonian problem at Geneva and its discussion could hardly fail to precipitate a crisis which the League Council might find it very difficult to control."^[81] London feared that League of Nations consideration of the Macedonian problem in Yugoslavia would amount to a de facto recognition of the Macedonian nationality. This would in turn legitimize to a certain extent the Macedonian demands for a united and independent Macedonia, thus challenging the existing status quo in the Balkans. The Memorandum made this quite clear: "Indeed, once the existence of a Macedonian nationality is even allowed to be presumed there is a danger that the entire Peace Settlement will be jeopardized by the calling into question, not merely of the frontiers between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, but also of those between Yugoslavia and Greece and between Yugoslavia and Albania"^[82] It strongly recommended that "this Balkan cancer" be treated

"not by drastic surgical excision (e.g. plebiscite resulting in a change of frontiers....)" but rather "by the use of the healing properties of time and by the use of radium treatment of persuasive diplomacy, which while basing itself on the territorial status quo, shall endeavor gradually to eradicate the open sore that has for so long poisoned the relations of the Balkan states."^[83]

The analysis and the recommendations of this memorandum remained the official British position on the Macedonian question virtually until the outbreak of World War II.

The Foreign Office interpreted the subsequent "degeneration" of the IMRO of Ivan Mihailov and, after the military coup in Sofia in 1934, the decline and cessation of its terrorist activities, as signs of the gradual eradication of "this Balkan cancer." In actual fact, this view represented a serious misreading, indeed, a rather crude misunderstanding of the transformation of Macedonian nationalism at the time. The IMRO, which had been divided between a right and a left wing from its very inception, finally split in 1924-1925. The left formed its own separate organization, the IMRO (United) and joined the Balkan Communist Federation and the Comintern. Unlike the right, it had a

clearly defined social, economic and particularly national program; unlike the terrorist campaign of the right, it enhanced the cause of both nationalism and communism in Macedonia through underground work. By the early 1930s it had attracted a large following and was challenging Mihailov's IMRO for leadership. Waterlow informed the Foreign Office of the split and the growing strength of the left in his report on the proceedings of the Tenth Congress of the Macedonian Brotherhoods in Bulgaria, the legal organization of Mihailov's IMRO, held in Sofia on 24-27 January 1932.

The opposite view [the left], which has lately grown within the movement, which was suppressed at the congress, but which was clearly set out in the communist press, is that Mihailoff has forsaken the ideal of the Macedonian movement, that he does not fight for the liberation of Macedonia and that he has become the tool of the Fascist regime in Bulgaria, which uses the Macedonian organization for the sole purpose of maintaining its dictatorship ... The Macedonian movement should again become national and independent, it should throw off the tutelage of the Bulgarian Government, which supports it only for its own ends, and it should fight for a genuinely independent Macedonia as part of a Balkan Federation under Soviet protection.[84]

The growth of the left undermined the support of the IMRO of Mihailov and forced the latter, for reasons of self-preservation, to free itself from the tutelage of the Bulgarian government and to identify itself with a Macedonian national program clearly calling for "the unification of Macedonian territories held by Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria, into an independent political entity within its natural geographical frontiers." [85] But it is safe to assume that this reorientation of the IMRO contributed to its suppression in 1934: by the second half of the 1930s most Bulgarians had become convinced "that the Macedonians have been more trouble in Bulgaria than they were worth and merely gave the country a bad name abroad without helping the national [Bulgarian] cause..." [86] IMRO's suppression, in turn, helped to enhance the role of the Macedonian left, whose nationalist activities had previously been hampered by the IMRO and whose many activists had fallen victims of the mihailovist terror. As Bentinck, the new minister at Sofia, pointed out:

Since the coup d'etat last year, however, the Macedonian communists became much more active, especially in Sofia and Bulgarian Macedonia. I am told the intention was to detach the three portions of Macedonia belonging to Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, and to unite them into a Soviet Republic - - - At the same time the communist parties in Bulgaria, Jugoslavia and Greece were ordered by Moscow to support the Macedonian communists... [87]

Thus, contrary to the hopes and expectations of the Foreign Office, neither the dissolution of the terrorist IMRO nor "the healing properties of time" resolved the Macedonian problem or caused it to disappear. Macedonian nationalism was forced underground and into the embrace of international communism, where it continued to grow. As Simeon Radev, a prominent Bulgarophile Macedonian and a well known retired Bulgarian diplomat, pointed out to Waterlow, "no solution of the [Macedonian] problem could be expected by the mere aflux of time. There was no prospect whatever of the population acquiescing in the policy of Serbianisation pursued by Belgrade...." He also emphasized "that the Macedonian sense of nationality was not a sense of Bulgarian nationality. It took the shape, especially with the younger generation, of an aspiration for autonomy." [88] On a private visit to Istanbul in September 1933, E. Venizelos, the great Greek statesman, expressed similar sentiments to Sir George Clerk, the British ambassador: Venizelos had always counseled that the Yugoslav Government should make a serious effort to content the Slav Macedonian minority... M. Venizelos maintained that these people, of which Greece has a small share...., are not pure Bulgarians, but something between Bulgarian and Serbian, and he had, he said, always been ready to give them Slav Macedonian schools and other reasonable privileges.[89]

Furthermore, as Radev had also argued, a driving force behind the Macedonian movement at this time was the fundamental belief that anything, however improbable, might occur in a world of flux. And central to this belief was "a desire for a union of all Macedonians in an autonomous state..." [90] As the outbreak of the Second World War approached the growing challenges to the status quo in Europe intensified this belief and desire in the second half of the 1930s.[91] In addition to the USSR or, rather, the communist movement, which already enjoyed widespread support among the Macedonians, by the end of the decade both Germany and Italy actively advocated schemes for "the liberation of Macedonia" with which "they are trying to attract Macedonians ..."[92]

While the Foreign Office either minimized or was ignorant of the strength of Macedonian nationalism on the left, it was not ready to overlook the spread of German and Italian influence in the area. And it was this more than anything else, that brought about a renewed British interest in the Macedonians and the beginning of a British reappraisal of the Macedonian national problem. After the fall of France in summer 1940, G.W. Rendel, the minister at Sofia, warned of the increased Soviet, German and Italian activities in Macedonia and concluded that "Presumably' however the Macedonians would accept any 'autonomous' Macedonian state which a great power succeeds in

establishing." [93] He analyzed the aims of the Macedonians in greater detail in a private letter to P.B.B. Nichols of the Foreign Office written ten days later:

My impression is that there is now a fairly large section of the Macedonians who look to Russia for their salvation. ... I think the pro -Russian groups probably hope for the eventual creation of an autonomous Macedonian Soviet Republic as one of a chain of South Slav Soviet states running from the Black Sea to the Adriatic and to the German and Italian frontiers. On the other hand, there are certainly a number of Macedonians who are short sighted enough to be ready to intrigue with Germany and Italy...The Macedonians are notoriously difficult, and have many of the characteristics of the Irish, and my impression is that they are happiest in opposition to any existing regime... [94]

Early in 1941 the vice consul at Skopje provided the Foreign Office with an even more extensive and perceptive analysis of the current state of the Macedonian problem. He claimed that the vast majority of the Macedonians belonged to the national movement; indeed, he estimated "that 90 percent of all Slav Macedonians were autonomists in one sense or another..." Because the movement was wrapped in secrecy, however, it was extremely difficult to gauge the relative strength of its various currents, except that it could be assumed that IMRO had lost ground since it was banned in Bulgaria and its leaders exiled. While the vice consul acknowledged the close relationship between communism and "autonomism" or nationalism in Macedonia, he downplayed the frequently expressed contention that the communists used the Macedonian movement for their own ends. Instead, he argued that since virtually every Macedonian was an autonomist, it was almost certain "that the Communists and autonomists are the same people..."; and, in any case, that Macedonian communists were not doctrinaire and were "regarded by other Balkan communists as weaker brethren..." "My own opinion," wrote Thomas, "is that they are autonomists in the first place and Communists only in the second." [95] He concluded his lengthy report by stressing what by then should have been obvious: the Macedonian problem was "a real one" and "an acute one" and that it "has in no way been artificially created by interested propaganda." He considered change unavoidable and felt that it was "in the interest of Yugoslavia to satisfy the aspirations of Macedonia." He was equally convinced, however, that it was highly improbable, "in view of the instinctive dislike of the Serbs engendered by twenty years of Serbian rule, that anything short of autonomy would be acceptable." [96]

Rendel's and Thomas's appraisals of the Macedonian situation were not radically different from many produced by their predecessors stationed in the Balkans. However, with the world once more at war, the Foreign Office now

accorded them more serious consideration and appeared, although grudgingly, to accept them. It seemed to accept the fact that Britain's hitherto refusal to officially recognize the existence of a Macedonian nationality, a policy that it had shaped and defended for over twenty years, might no longer prove tenable and most likely would not survive the war. In a highly revealing, indeed almost prophetic, comment on Thomas's report, Reginald J. Bowker of the Foreign Office conceded this when he wrote: "To the layman the only possible solution of the Macedonian problem would seem to be in giving the Macedonians some sort of autonomy within Yugoslavia. Possibly after the war the Yugoslavs may be willing to consider this. But such a measure would, no doubt, incur the risk of whetting the appetite of the Macedonians for complete independence."^[97]

The lack of official recognition or legitimacy internationally and in the three Balkan states obviously had hindered the normal and natural development of Macedonian identity. However, it could not destroy it. Macedonianism in its various manifestations-particularism, patriotism, nationalism-was too deeply entrenched among the Macedonian people and among the small, but vibrant and dynamic intelligentsia, especially on the political left. During World War II, which began for the Balkans in late 1940 and early 1941, Macedonians in all three parts of their divided land joined resistance movements in large numbers and fought for national unification and liberation.^[98] They did not achieve national unification; however, the Macedonians in Vardar or Yugoslav Macedonia won not only national recognition but also legal equality with the other nations of the new, communistled, federal Yugoslavia.

Notes

1. For a discussion of the significance of international recognition or legitimacy in the development of Balkan nationalisms, see especially John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 103-11, 115-16 and 373; and Alan Warwick Palmer, *The Lands Between: A History of East-Central Europe since the Congress of Vienna* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 28-29.
2. See especially Blaze Ristovski, *Makedonskiot narod i makedonskata nacija* (Skopje: Misl, 1983), 1: 75-86, 163-87, 263-80. Ristovski is the leading authority on Macedonian national thought and development. His two volumes contain previously published studies on the subject. See also the following works published recently in the west: Fikret Adanir, *Die Makedonische Frage. Ihre Entstehung und Entwicklung bis 1908* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1979); Marco Dogo, *Lingua e Nazionalita' in Macedonia: Vicende e pensieri di profeti disarmati, 1902-1903* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1985); Jutta de Jong, *Die nationale*

Kern des makedonischen Problems: Ansätze und Grundlagen einer makedonischen Nationalbewegung (1890-1903) (Frankfurt: Lang, 1982); Andrew Rossos, "*Macedonianism and Macedonian Nationalism on the Left*" to be published in Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery, eds., *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*.

3. The literature on the struggles in Macedonia is vast but rather uneven and polemical in nature. A good documentary survey in English of the activities of the neighboring Balkan states in Macedonia is to be found in George P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1926-1938), 5: 100-23. Among the more useful works in western languages are Duncan M. Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Revolutionary Movements, 1893-1903* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988); Henry N. Brailsford, *Macedonia: Its Races and Their Future* (1906, reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1980); Elizabeth Barker, *Macedonia: Its Place in Balkan Power Politics* (1950, reprint, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980); Jacques Ancel, *La Macedoine* (Paris, 1930); Gustav Weigand, *Ethnographie von Makedonien* (Leipzig, 1924). For a representative sampling of the divergent points of view, see Jovan M. Jovanovic, *Juzna Srbija od kraja XVIII veka do oslobodjenja* (Belgrade, 1941) (Serbian); G. Bazhdarov, *Makedonskijat vapros vchera i dnes*, (Sofia, 1925) (Bulgarian); Georgios Modes, *O makedonikos agon kai i neoteri makedoniki istoria* (Salonica: Etaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1967) (Greek). Macedonian historians have turned their attention to this problem more recently. See Kliment Dzambazovski, *Kulturno-opstestvenite vrski na Makedonците so Srbija vo tekot na XIX vek* (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija (Ini), 1960); Risto Poplazarov, *Grckata politka sprema Makedonija vo vtorata polovina na XIX i pocetokot na XX vek* (Skopje: Ini, 1973); Slavko Dimevski, *Makedonskoto nacionalno osloboditelno dvizenie i egzarijata (1893-1912)* (Skopje: Kultura, 1963); Krste Bitoski, *Makedonija i Knezevstvo Bugarija (1893-1903)* (Skopje: Ini, 1977). On the partition of Macedonia, see Andrew Rossos, *Russia and the Balkans: Inter-Balkan Rivalries and Russian Foreign Policy, 1908-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); Petar Stojanov, *Makedonija vo vremeto na balkanskite i prvata svetska vojna (1912-1918)* (Skopje: Ini, 1969).

4. Blaze Ristovski, *Portreti i procesi od makedonskata literaturna i nacionalna istorija* (Skopje: Kultura, 1990), 3: 34.

5. Ristovski, op cit. and 2: 24-72; and my forthcoming study "*Macedonianism and Macedonian Nationalism on the Left*."

6. The Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian claims were extensively publicized. For a representative sampling of the divergent points of view, see Tihomir R.

Georgevich, *Macedonia* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1918) (Serbian); Jordan Ivanov, *La question macedoine* (Paris, 1920) (Bulgarian); Cleanthes Nicolaides, *La Macedoine* (Berlin, 1899) (Greek). See also the works cited in note 3.

7. See (London) Public Record Office, FO371/10667, Central Department, Memorandum, "*The Macedonian Question and Komitaji Activity*," 26 November 1925, 3-4. (All Foreign Office documents cited hereafter are found in the Public Record Office). See also Hristo Andonov-Poljanski, *Velika Britania i makedonskoto prasnje na pariskata mirovna konferencija vo 1919 godina* (Skopje: Arhiv na Makedonija, 1973); Ivan Katardziev, *Vreme na zreenje. Makedonskoto nacionalno prasanje megju dvete svetski vojni (1919-1930)* (Skopje: Kultura, 1977), 1: chap. 1. Katardziev provides the most comprehensive, valuable and interesting treatment of the Macedonian national question in the 1920s.

8. FO371/14316, A. Henderson (Belgrade) to N. Henderson, 9 May 1930, Enclosure 2, "Memorandum by Vice-Consul Blakeney."

9. FO371/29785, Campbell (Belgrade) to Halifax, 6 January 1941. On developments in Vardar Macedonia during the interwar years, see also Katardziev, op.cit., 1: 23-85; Institut za nacionalna istorija, *Istorija na makedonskiot narod* (Skopje, 1969), 3: part 11; Aleksandar Apostolov, *Kolonizacijata na Makedonija vo stara Jugoslavija* (Skopje: Kultura, 1966), and "*Specificnata polozba na makedonskiot narod vo kralstvoto Jugoslavija*," *Glasnik* (Skopje) 16, no.1(1972): 39-62.

10. FO 371/8566, Bentinck (Athens) to Curzon, 20 August 1923, Enclosure, Colonel A.C. Corfe, "*Notes on a Tour Made by the Commission on Greco-Bulgarian Emigration in Western and Central Macedonia*," 5. By "Bulgars," Lambros meant Macedonians.

11. On the situation of the Macedonians in Aegean Macedonia, see Andrew Rossos, *The Macedonians of Aegean Macedonia: A British Officer's Report, 1944*," *The Slavonic and East European Review* (London) 69, no.2 (April 1991): 282-88. See also Katardziev, *Vreme na zreenje*, 1: 85-106; *Istorija na makedonskiot narod*, 3: part 13; Stojan Kiselinovski, *Grckata kolonizacija vo Egejska Makedonija (1913-1940)* (Skopje: Ini, 1981); Lazo Mojsov, *Okolu prasanjeto na makedonskoto nacionalno malcinstovo vo Grcija* (Skopje: Ini, 1954), 207-87; Giorgi Abadziev, et al., *Egejska Makedonija vo nasata nacionalna istorija* (Skopje, 1951).

12. Rossos, "*Macedonians of Aegean Macedonia*," 293-94. Captain P.H. Evans' "*Report on the Free Macedonia Movement in Area Florina 1944*" is given verbatim, 291-309.

13. FO371/12856, Kennard (Belgrade) to Sargent, 16 February 1928

14. FO371/8568, 22. A few years later, O. Sargent, a counselor in the

Foreign Office, complained that "the Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation... defies openly the Bulgarian Government and practically administers and governs part of the Bulgarian territory" (FO371/12856, Sargent [London] to Sperling, 1 October 1928).

15. On Pirin Macedonia as well as the Macedonians in Bulgaria, see Katardziev, *Vreme na zreenje*, 1: 107-19; *Istorija na makedonskiot narod*, 3: part 12; Dimitar Mitrev, *Pirinska Makedonija* (Skopje: Nasa Kniga 1970), 126-202.

16. See Stefan Troebst, *Mussolini, Makedonien und die Machte, 1922-1930: Die "Innere Makedonische Revolutionäre Organisation" in der Südosteuropapolitik der faschistischen Italien* (Cologne: Bohlau, 1987); and Barker, Macedonia, chap. 2; Leften S. Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation: A History of the Movement Toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times* (1944, reprint, Hamden: Archon Books, 1964), chaps. 8 and 9.

17. FO371/8568, p.22.

18. FO371/7375, Erskine (Sofia) to Curzon, 25 January 1922. Harold Nicolson commented: "There is less disparity between the Irish and Macedonian temperament than might be supposed" (Minute, 1 February 1922).

19. Katardziev, *Vreme na zreenje*, 1: part 2, chap. 1.

20. Kiselinovski, *Grckata kolonizacija*, chap. 4.

21. Katardziev, op.cit.; Dino Kiosev, *Istoria na makedonskoto natsionalno revoliutsionerno dvizhenie* (Sofia: Otechestven front 1954) 493-99

22. Katardziev, *Vreme na zreenje*, 1:171-83 and part 2, chap. 2; Kiosev, *ibid.*, 512- 28. On the activities of the IMRO in all three parts of Macedonia, see also the memoirs of its leader after 1924: Ivan Mikhailov, *Spomeni*, 4 vols. (Selci, Louvain, Indianapolis, 1952, 1965, 1967, 1973).

23. Katardziev, *Vreme na zreenje*, 1: 375-76; *Istorija na makedonskiot narod*, 3: 20-23, 176-78; Evangelos Kofos, *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia* (Salonica: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1964), 69; Dimitrios G. Kousoulas, *Revolution and Defeat: The Story of the Communist Party of Greece* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 65.

24. FO371/7377, Erskine (Sofia) to Curzon, 20 March 1922.

25. FO371/6197, Peel (Sofia) to Curzon, 10 February 1921.

26. See FO371/8568.

27. On communism and Macedonian nationalism, see Katardziev, *Vreme na zreenje*, 1: part 3, chaps. 1-4, 2: part 5, and ed., *Predavnicite na makedonskoto delo* (Skopje: Kultura, 1983), 5-56; Stojan Kiselinovski, *KPG i makedonskoto nacionalno prasanje, 1918-1940* (Skopje: Misl, 1985), chaps. 2-4; Kiril Miljovski, *Makedonskoto prasanje vo nacionalnata programa na KPJ (1919-1937)* (Skopje: Kultura, 1962), 24-140; Dimitar Mitrev, *BKP i Pirinska Makedonija* (Skopje: Kultura, 1960), 42-59; Kofos, op.cit., chap. 4; Darinka

Pacemska, *Vnatresnata makedonska revolucionerna organizacija (Obedineta)* (Skopje: "Studentski zbor," 1985). I have dealt with the subject in "*Macedonianism and Macedonian Nationalism on the Left*" to be published in Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery, eds., *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*.

28. FO371/10667, Central Department, Memorandum, "The Macedonian Question and Komitaji Activity," 26 November 1925, 4.
29. FO371/10793, Kennard (Belgrade) to A. Chamberlain, 6 July 1925, Enclosure, Footman (Skopje) to Kennard, 30 June 1925, 5. John David Footman was a fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford (1953-1963) and author of several books on modern Russian history.
30. See especially *ibid.*, 14 and FO371/8568, 3 and FO371/10667, 6.
31. FO371/11405, Kennard (Belgrade) to A. Chamberlain, 21 April 1926; Enclosure R.A. Gallon. "Conditions in Macedonia," 19 April 1926, 4.
32. FO371/11245, O. Ch. Harvey, "Notes on a Visit to Yugoslavia and Greece," April 1926, 6 May 1926, 3.
33. FO371/11405, 5.
34. FO371/10793, 6.
35. FO371/8566, 3.
36. FO371/10793, 6.
37. FO371/14316, N. Henderson (Belgrade) to A. Henderson, 13 May 1930, Enclosures.
38. FO371/14317, Central Department, Memorandum, "The Origins of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation and Its History Since the Great War," 1 July 1930, 12.
39. See FO371/11337, Kennard (Belgrade) to H. Smith, Enclosure, R.A. Gallop "Notes," 23 April 1926.
40. FO371/11337, C.H. Bateman, "Memorandum on "Serbian Minorities in Greek Macedonia," 3 March 1926, 2.
41. *Ibid.*
42. See FO371/10793 and FO371/11337.
43. FO371/11337.
44. See FO371/8568.
45. FO371/8566.
46. FO371/10793. Footman dismissed the Serbian claims to a "Serbian minority" in Aegean Macedonia and pointed to two other factors as the real causes of the Greek-Serbian dispute: "a) Politically, the Serb displeasure at Slav inhabitants of Greek Macedonia being recognized as Bulgars; and b) Economically, the loss suffered by Serbian Macedonia and the Kingdom as a whole by being separated by a frontier from Salonica" (6).
47. FO371/10667, Central Department, Memorandum, "The Macedonian Question and Komitaji

Activity," 26 November 1925. It gave the following figures: Macedonian Slavs 1,150,000; Turks 400,000; Greeks 300,000; Vlachs 200,000; Albanians 120,000; Jews 100,000; Gypsies 10,000 (2).

48. Ibid., 4.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., 1, 4; See also Rossos, "Macedonians of Aegean Macedonia," 284-85, 290, 293-94.

52. Ibid., 7.

53. FO371/11337,1

54. Ibid., 4.

55. FO371/11405, Kennard (Belgrade) to A. Chamberlain, 21 April 1926, Enclosure, R.A. Gallop, "Conditions in Macedonia," 19 April 1926,1.

56. "I should like to know the names of any authorities who are impartial," wrote Gallop. "Certainly none of the Serbian, Bulgarian, Russian, British or German ever are!" (FO371/11337, Enclosure, 23 April 1926).

57. FO371/11245, 2.

58. Ibid., p.3.

59. Footman argued that "such local autonomy would have greater chance of success were it to be introduced by some future government in which Croats and Slovenes held the preponderating position. There is throughout Macedonia a sullen bitterness against the Serbs..." (FO371/12856, Footman [Skopje] to Kennard, 4 February 1928 in Kennard [Belgrade] to Chamberlain, 18 February 1928).

60. Ibid., Kennard (Belgrade) to Sargent, 16 February 1928, Minute, 24 February 1928; see also Sargent (London) to Kennard, 20 February 1928.

61. Ibid., Sperling (Sofia) to Cushendun, 13 September 1928.

62. Ibid., Kennard (Belgrade) to Sargent, 20 September 1928.

63. Ibid., C.H. Bateman, Minute, 20 September 1928.

64. Ibid., O. Sargent, Minute, 28 September 1928.

65. Ibid., R.G. Vansittart, Minute, 29 September 1928. Robert Gilbert Vansittart was knighted in 1929 and created a baron in 1941

66. Ibid., Sargent (London) to Sperling, 10 October 1928

67. Ibid., Sperling (Sofia) to Sargent, 10 October 1928.

68. Ibid., C.H. Bateman, Minute, 18 October 1928.

69. Ibid., Sargent (London) to Sperling, 22 October 1928

70. "The fact was of course that the framers of the Minorities Treaty hesitated to mention them under any specific name," wrote Bateman. "The most they could be called is Macedo-Slavs" (ibid., C.H. Bateman, Minute, 18

October 1928).

71. Great Britain, Foreign Office, *The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Year Book for 1935* (London, 1935), 416.
72. FO371/14316, Waterlow (Sofia) to Vansittart, 21 May 1930.
73. *Ibid.*, 7.
74. *Ibid.*, 8-9.
75. *Ibid.*, 9.
76. *Ibid.*, J. Balfour, Minute, 2 June 1930.
77. FO371/13573, Central Department, Memorandum, "The Macedonian Question and Komitaji Activity," 6 December 1929, 9 pp.
78. FO371/14317, Central Department, Memorandum, "The Origins of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and Its History Since the Great War," 1 July 1930, 16 pp.
79. *Ibid.*, 9.
80. *Ibid.*, 14.
81. *Ibid.*, 15.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, 16.
84. FO371/57473, Waterlow (Sofia) to Simon, 5 February 1932. According to the assistant to the Bishop of Nevrokop, one of the major centers of Pirin Macedonia, "The Revolutionary Organization itself was split by a growing Communist current, ... aiming at the liberation of Macedonia by the bolshevisation of the Balkans, while the local population was in its turn divided, about half being for the organization and half against, and the hostile half being largely Communist in feeling (FO371/15896, Waterlow [Sofia] to Simon, 22 June 1932; see also FO371/19486, Bentinck [Sofia] to Hoare, 16 September 1935 and 26 September 1935). On the left of the Macedonian movement see also the works cited in note 27.
85. FO371/16650, Waterlow (Sofia) to Simon, 27 February 1933.
86. FO371/24880, Rendel (Sofia) to Nichols, 25 August 1940.
87. FO371/19486. Bentinck (Sofia) to Hoare, 26 September 1935.
88. FO371/16651, Waterlow (Sofia) to Simon, 21 July 1933.
89. FO371/16775, Clerk (Constantinople) to Simon, ^ October 1933.
90. FO371/16651
91. On the aims of Macedonian nationalism on the left in the 1930s, see Biblioteka "Makedonsko zname," no.1, *Ideite i zadachite na Makedonskoto progresivno dvizenje v Bulgaria* (Sofia, 1933); Ristovski, *Makedonskiot narod i Makedonskata Nacija*, 2: 481-560; and my forthcoming study "*Macedonianism and Macedonian Nationalism on the Left.*"
92. FO371/24880, Rendel (Sofia) to F.O., 15 August 1940.
93. *Ibid.*

94. FO371/24880, Rendel (Sofia) to Nichols, 25 August 1940. George L. Clutton of the Foreign Office described the Macedonians as "discontented peasants who are anti-Yugoslav, anti-Greek, anti-Bulgarian, anti-German, and anti everything except possibly anti-Russian" (FO371/24880, Campbell [Belgrade] to F.O., 4 September 1940, G.L. Clutton, Minute, 10 September 1940).
95. FO371/29785, Campbell (Belgrade) to Halifax, 6 January 1941, Enclosure, "Report on the General Situation in Southern Serbia by Mr. Thomas, British Vice-Consul at Skoplje."
96. Ibid..
97. Ibid., Reginald J. Bowker, Minute, 16 January 1941.
98. On the aims of Macedonian nationalism during the Second World War, see the informative and illuminating discussions by Kiril Miljovski, "*Motivite na revolucijata 1941-1944 godina vo Makedonija*," *Istorija* (Skopje) 10, no.1 (1974): 19ff; and by Cvetko Uzunovski, "*Vostanieto vo 1941 vo Makedonija*," *Istorija*, 10, no.2 (1974): 103 if.