

COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH INTO SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE OF THE MACEDONIAN
ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS

MACEDONIA AND ITS RELATIONS WITH GREECE

The Macedonian question as an integral part of the international recognition of Macedonia is now preoccupying the attention of the states of the European Community and the United Nations and also the wider world public. This has been brought about by the opposition of the Republic of Greece to the recognition of the Republic of Macedonia under its historical and constitutional name. This has gravely damaged relations in this part of the Balkans, threatening the peace and the stability of this part of Europe. Thus the Greek-Macedonian dispute which has, particularly in the last century, had its own history is now on the agenda once more. It has reached its culmination in the last few years just as Macedonia, by means of a referendum of its citizens, has proclaimed its independence and, as a sovereign state, is fighting for international status in the world community. In order to hinder this and render it impossible, in the past few years alone a whole little library of books, brochures, reviews and audio-visual materials has been published in neighbouritig Greece and distributed throughout the world. This large quantity of high quality paper represents the Greek view of the matter, according to which neither the Macedonian people, its language or its culture exists. These are inventions, a political construct and some sort of alchemy on the part of the "Skopje historians". This, albeit unintentionally, reveals the true motives of the Greek anti-Macedonian policy in which the "question of the name" in fact occupies a wholly marginal position. The tragic nature of the dispute, however, lies in the fact that it has not taken place within the parameters of historical scholarship, linguistics or cultural history but, most frequently, though a day-to-day un scholarly denial of the Macedonian people, its language and its culture and, within recent history, it has involved the use of physical and mental repression against that "non-existent people" in the Aegean part of Macedonia. On the basis of existing and available historical documentation, we are here setting out the genesis of the Macedonian people on this soil with particular emphasis on Greek-Macedonian relations. We hope that this will make it possible for the essence of this "dispute" and of this tragic failure in understanding to be viewed more clearly. The history of Greek-Macedonian relations has, however, another and a good side to it. We mention this precisely because we are convinced that it is not merely a matter of past history. Once upon a time, in the golden age of the development of culture and art in these parts, the ancient Greek cultural and civilizational influence was a fruitful one for Macedonian culture and art and for Slavonic culture at large. This was the case from the very outset of the coming of the Macedonian Slavs to this area, the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula, and to the Byzantine Empire which contained the most glittering culture in the Europe of the time. It is to this influence in large measure that are owed the great Slavonic cultural verticals which first saw the light of day in Macedonia and then spread throughout the entire Slav world: from the Christianization of the Slav masses to the works of literature and of art. From the contact with Byzantium there grew in Macedonia the stem of Macedonian and Slavonic literacy and culture. Thus as early as the Middle ages, within the framework of the late Roman Empire and Byzantium, following their Christianization and then throughout the period of Ottoman rule and right up to the close of the 18th century the Macedonians made a significant contribution to culture and to art through the achievements of outstanding thinkers,

writers, fresco- and icon-painters, builders and composers within the overall development of Slavonic and Byzantine art. From these parts, numerous individuals of worth and merit in Christian civilization at large were canonized as saints; first and foremost the founders of Slavic literacy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius and their disciples. For centuries, until shortly before the close of the 18th century, there existed no essential antagonism between Macedonians and Greeks, since on Macedonian soil there was a continuously ebbing and flowing process of spiritual blossoming arising out of the contacts and the autochthonous artistic creations of these ethnic entities. This process was to be halted by the attempt to recreate the glory of the classical and medieval periods through the assimilation in various forms of other ethnic regions, particularly through pressure on ecclesiastical life, dictated by the Patriarchate of Constantinople with its Greek administration. After the dissolution of the Archbishopric of Ohrid this process led to an antagonism between these two environments which had such close cultural traditions. It is therefore not strange that all this has been forgotten in more modern times. Today we are confronted by the irrational white-heat of a Greek-Macedonian dispute which has assumed such dimensions that it has rendered rational communication an impossibility not merely on the diplomatic level but also on the economic, cultural and political levels. Setting out the fundamental reasons why an escalation of this conflict has come about precisely now, the Council for Research into South-Eastern Europe of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts considers it its scholarly duty to make its contribution towards casting an objective light on this question which is of such great significance for the place of the Macedonian people and the Republic of Macedonia in the world community of peoples and for the opening up of a fresh, European prospect for Greek-Macedonian relations.

(text provided courtesy of Angel Shopoff)

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