

FOREWORD To the photoprint edition of *Abecedar* (1925—1985)

By HRISTO ANDONOVSKI

In 1985 it was sixty years since a book of great importance to Macedonian linguistics and historiography was published in Athens; that was the primer entitled *Abecedar* (A B C), printed in the Latin alphabet, and intended for the children of the Macedonian national minority in Greece — the "Slav speaking minority" as Sir Austin Chamberlain, British diplomat and delegate to the League of Nations, and Sir James Erick Drumond, General Secretary to the League of Nations, referred to the Macedonians in Greece. (Voislav Kushevski, "On the Appearance of the *Abecedar*" in *Istorija* magazine, 1983, No. 2, p. 184).

There are several reasons for marking this anniversary: In 1920 Greece signed before the League of Nations a treaty obliging it to grant certain rights to the minorities of non-Greek origin in Greece. Four years later, in 1924, at the suggestion of the League of Nations, Greece and Bulgaria signed the well-known Kalfov-Politis Protocol under which Bulgaria was obliged to grant the Greek minority in Bulgaria their minority rights (language, schools and other rights), while Greece, recognizing the Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia as a "Bulgarian" minority, was to grant them their minority rights. This agreement was seemingly very much in favour of Bulgaria, but when in 1925 the Greek government undertook certain concrete steps towards the publication of the first primer made for the specific needs of that minority, it made it clear that there were no grounds on which Bulgaria could be officially interested in any "Bulgarian minority" or expect the primer to be in Bulgarian, for that minority — though speaking a Slav language — was neither Bulgarian nor Serbian.

The very fact that official Greece did not, either *de jure* or *de facto*, see the Macedonians as a Bulgarian minority, but rather as a separate Slav group ("Slav speaking minority"), is of particular significance. The primer, published in the Latin alphabet, was based on the Lerin — Bilola dialect. After Gianelli's *Dictionary* dating from the 16th century, and the *Daniloviot Cetirjazicnik* written in the 19th century, this was yet another book written in the Macedonian vernacular. The primer was mailed to some regions in Western Aegean-Macedonia (Kostur, Lerin and Voden), and the school authorities prepared to give Macedonian children, from the first to the fourth grade of the elementary school, instruction in their own mother tongue (Grigorios Dafnis, "Greece between the two world wars", "Elefteria" newspaper, March 15, 1953, Dionisios Romas in "Elefteria" newspaper of October 9 and 12, 1954 and Dimitrios Vazuglis in *Racial and religious minorities in Greece and Bulgaria*, 1954).

The Greek governments, however, have never made a sincere attempt to solve the question of the Macedonians and their ethnic rights in Greece. Thus, while measures were being undertaken for the opening of Macedonian schools, a clash between the Greek and the Bulgarian armies at Petrich was concocted, which was then followed by a massacre of the innocent Macedonian population in the village of Trlis near Serres, all this with the aim of creating an attitude of insecurity within the Macedonians, so that they would themselves give up the recognition of their minority rights, and eventually seek safety in moving to Bulgaria. The Greek governments also skillfully used the Yugoslav-Bulgarian disagreements on the question of the Macedonians in Greece, and with organized pressure on the Macedonian population, as was the case in the village of Trlis, tried to dismiss the Macedonian ethnic question from the agenda through forced resettlement of the Macedonian population outside of Greece.

The Abecedar, which actually never reached the Macedonian children, is in itself a powerful testimony not only of the existence of the large Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece, but also of the fact that Greece was under an obligation before the League of Nations to undertake certain measures in order to grant this particular minority their rights. We should therefore give a brief account of what preceded the publication of the Abecedar.

II. THE TREATY OF SEVRES AND THE RIGHTS OF THE MINORITIES IN GREECE

In 1920 the League of Nations initiated the signing of treaties relating to the protection of the minorities in a number of European countries, which specified the obligations of the states with regard to providing such minorities with civil and political equality. On August 10, 1920 such a treaty for the protection of the non-Greek ethnic minorities in Greece was signed between the Great Powers and Greece; it was named the Treaty of Sevres, after the place in France where it was signed.

By signing the Treaty of Sevres, Greece undertook certain obligations towards the minorities and their life, their property and freedom, as well as their civil and political rights. The Treaty of Sevres guaranteed the minorities in Greece free use of their mother tongue in their personal and official relations. The Greek government undertook the obligation to provide for a special budget intended for the undisturbed development of schools for the minorities. Articles 7, 8 and 9 of the Treaty of Sevres are of particular significance here and shall therefore be partially quoted:

Article 7: *"All Greek citizens will enjoy equal civil and political rights regardless of their ethnicity, language or religion. Greece, in particular, is undertaking the obligation to introduce, within three years from the date as of which this Treaty will come into force, electoral system which will take into account the ethnic minorities.."*

"No legislation will be made on any restrictions on the free use by any Greek citizen of any language, either in their private intercourse, in commerce, in religion, in the Press or in publications of any kind, or at public meetings.. ."

Article 8: *"Greek citizens belonging to separate ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, will enjoy equality of rights and treatment, and the same guarantees, as other Greek citizens. They shall, for instance, have the right to establish, manage and control at their own expense charitable, religious and social institutions and educational establishments, as well as the right to use their own language in them and to practice their particular religion."*

Article 9: *"As regards education, in the towns and districts inhabited by a larger number of citizens of non-Greek language, the Greek government shall make adequate facilities enabling the children of such Greek citizens to receive instruction in elementary schools in their mother tongue. . ."*

We should also quote the writing of Sotirios Kodjamanis, the Greek politician of Macedonian origin: "The victors of World War I had imposed upon Greece not only the recognition of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, but had also forced Greece to realise that the treaties dealing with minorities were of international interest, and came under the guarantee of the League of Nations."

"We were under obligation — Kodjamanis says further on — not to change those conventions without prior consent by the majority of members of the League of Nations." (Sotirios Kodjamanis: "National questions", Athens, 1954, pages 34—35).

Panaiotis Pipinelis, one of the old Greek diplomats, wrote in his commentary on the Treaty of Sevres that "the treaty did not specify the existence of a Macedonian minority in Greece." That, as it were, minorities were mentioned only in general terms, and that the term minorities in Greece referred "only to Turkish and Jewish minorities". Such a statement, however, does not correspond with the truth. Because, in the spirit of the Treaty of Sevres, there was in 1924 another agreement signed at the suggestion of the League of Nations, between the governments of Greece and Bulgaria; this was known as the Kalfov-Politis Protocol, with which the Greek government, concealing its true intentions, recognized the Macedonians of the Aegean part of Macedonia as a "Bulgarian" minority in Greece. The Greek side made this concession so that minority rights would be granted to the Greek minority in Bulgaria. Soon afterwards, however, the Greek government denied the Bulgarian government the right to be interested in the Macedonian population in Greece, claiming that it was in no way a Bulgarian minority. To that effect, the Greek government undertook in 1925 the publication of the Abecedar in the Croatian Latin alphabet, intended not for the "Bulgarian" minority in Greece, but for the Slavs in Greece who spoke a Slav language. And that the Slav speaking minority in Greece were the Macedonians and only the Macedonians is witnessed in the *Diary* of David Hunter Miller, the American diplomat who took part in the Versailles Peace

Conference. On page 292, he explicitly mentions the Macedonian minority (David Hunter Miller, *My Diary at the Conference of Paris with Documents*, New York). Bartello, the principal author of the Treaty, also spoke of the Macedonian minority. In addition to all this, when talking about the minorities in Greece and their rights, the Greek authors Grigorios Dafnis in his historical newspaper-report "Greece between the two wars" ("Elefteria" newspaper of 15 March 1953), Dionisios Ramos in "Elefteria" of 9 and 12 October 1954 in the feuilleton "Minorities", Dimitrios Vazuglis in the booklet "*Racial and religious minorities in Greece and Bulgaria*", as well as Ioannis Sofianopoulos, the politician and the leader of the left liberals in Greece, in his book "*How I saw the Balkans*". (Athens, 1927) — all clearly speak of Slav, Macedonian, Slav-speaking minority in Greece. A more convincing reply, could not be found to Pipinelis's statement that it was not the Macedonian Slav minority that was referred to in the Treaty of Sevres.

The concrete steps taken by the Greek government under pressure from the League of Nations included the following: a special department was formed within the Ministry of Education, which was to deal with the ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, and to take care of the education of these minorities. In 1925, the government published the *Abecedar*, which was given wide publicity in the Greek press of the time ("Athinaikos typos", "Elefteron Vima", and other). Nikolas Zarifis, the Greek publicist and expert in the questions of the Balkans, praised the publication of this primer as a remarkable event in the life of the minorities in Greece. In "Elefteron Vima" of 19 October 1925, Zarifis says among other things: "We already have a complete primer for the Slav speaking, carefully and conscientiously prepared by our specialists Messrs Papazahariu, Saiktsis and Lazaru. It is a work which despite all the problems encountered in its compilation is now a reference book.. ."

"We have before us, goes on Zarifis, "the *Primer* entitled *Abecedar*, intended for use in the schools which are yet to open in Greek Macedonia and in West Thrace, and intended to meet the needs of the Slav speaking minority. This primer will be used in the instruction of the Slav speakers in Greece. The primer is made in the Latin alphabet and is based on the *Macedonian dialect*". (underlined by H. A.)

The school inspectors of the elementary schools in the Macedonian districts were put in charge of making teaching programmes for the classes consisting of Macedonian children. And everything was ready for the opening of schools for the Slav speakers (the Macedonians — H. A.). The above measures by the Greek government were intended to convince the League of Nations of Greece's efforts in implementing of the stipulations of the Treaty regarding the rights of the Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece, and thus gaining the praise of the League of Nations.

III. A FEW WORDS ON THE LANGUAGE OF THE PRIMER

Since the Greek government took the view that the Slav speakers in Greece were neither Bulgarians nor Serbs but a separate ethnic group, the commission working on the primer decided on the Croatian Latin alphabet which would contain separate signs for the

soft *n* when followed by the vowel *y* (which was spelled with the German *ü*: *lüge*, *zaklūci*, *se lūlka*) for the vowel *p* (spelled with the Romanian sign for dark vowel *î*: *bîrkam*, *dîrvo*, *kîrsam*, *mîrda*), (Blazhè Ristovski: "*Abecedar* - the primer for the Macedonian children in Ae gean Macedonia" "*Razgledi*" magazine, Skopje, May 1959, p. 1092).

The Primer, printed in the P. D. Sakclariu's printing-house in Athens on 40 pages 8°, took as its language the Lerin-Bitola dialect, presented therein as a standard literary language (the three compilers of the *Abecedar* originated from the Bitola region, and were probably of Vlach origin). They rejected both the Bulgarian **and** Vuk Karadjich's Serbian Cyrillic alphabet.

Here are some of the texts in the *Abecedar*:

Snagata na čoeko.

Site *lüge* imat edna glava, dve race, dve nodze. Glávata ima zgore kosie, i napret ima dve oči, eden nos i edna usta. Ustata natre ima zabi i eden jazik. Zábite set beli, jaziko je cîrven. So ústata jádime, píeme i zbórvame. So racete rabótame, so nódzite ódime, tîrcame i rîpame. Jas tîrčam bîrgu i ripam mnogu vísoko.

Maikata moldzi kózata

Je rano. Maika moldzi kozata. Maro i Lenka tîrčat da vidat kako se moldzi kózata. Mlékoto ji ušče tóplo. Máikata i dava da piat po edna časa toplo mieko. Piat, piat so golem kef. Lenka vika: A! ščo blago i slatco miéko

Lenka, lošata čupa

Petre i Gjorgia odat ná-pole za da igrat so drugárite. Málata sestra na Petre, Lenka, sákat i taja da odi sónimi da igra. Petre ja nékeše. Lenka plači, vika i se firii ná-zemnja i fati da klocat. Fústano mu se stori berbat. Bábata ja sluša kako plácese ot áurot, kai dávaše seno na volóite. Istírca i ja krena, ja ístrese i mu dade edno cîrveno jábólko. Lenka papsa da plači i si go jade jabólkoto

As stated by Blazhè Ristovski in the study mentioned earlier, the quoted texts show that the authors of the *Primer* stressed the third syllable from the end; the consonants *ч* and *ш* were marked with the separate signs *č* and *š*; and the consonant *s* is spelled as *ðz*, the soft consonants *ќ* and *ѝ* are spelled in two ways: *ќ-ќj* and *ѝ-ѝj* (*Гjopѝua*, etc.). As is known, the Bitola dialect does not have articles at the end of the word. The commission was consistent so that the words in the primer do not have the end *ū*: *јазико*, *зеїū*, *даскало*, etc.

Had the *Abecedar* been really allowed wide use in the schools of the Aegean part of Macedonia, it would undoubtedly have had a significant role in the development of the Macedonian literary language; but even as it is, it is of special importance to the history

of the Macedonian language. The Greek governments have unfortunately always provided hastened and cheap excuses to avoid granting minority rights to the Macedonian people in Greece. They welcomed the reactions by the Yugoslav and Bulgarian governments to the language used in the Primer.

When criticizing the government's inconsistency, Ioannis Sofianopoulos says: ". . . Our politicians did not only show lack of care and faith, but, also on the contrary, they systematically avoided any sign of it", and he adds visionarily: "What could tame the spirit and eliminate hate?" To this he himself replies: "Three things:

a true protection of the minorities, a question which ought not to be associated to any forced resettlements out of the country; proper education of the new generation in schools; and greater communication between different countries of the Balkans. . . . Everybody should understand, — ends Sofianopoulos — "that *opulos* cannot be endlessly converted, into *opovich*, or *opovich* into *opov* and vice-versa, and that the conscience and free-will should be respected and allowed expression." (Ioannis Sofianopoulos: "*How I saw the Balkans*," p. 204).

Thus, instead of solving the Macedonian ethnic, or more precisely, minority question, the Greek governments have in fact contributed with their one-sided actions to the growing lack of confidence and hatred of the Macedonian people in Greece for the Greek regimes. Only the true protection, as stated by Sofianopoulos, of the Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece, which were the most numerous of all the minorities in the country, could help the growth of brotherly relations between the Macedonians and the Greeks, and that again would create a more favorable atmosphere for the strengthening of the peace and mutual respect in this part of the Balkan.

A TESTIMONY OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE MACEDONIAN PEOPLE(*)

D-r VOISLAV D. KUSHEVSKI

We have gathered here today to mark the publication of the jubilee photoprint edition of the Abecedar (A B C Primer), on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of its original publication in Athens at the end of May 1925. The first publication of this primer was initiated by the Greek government which followed the directions of the Council of the League of Nations declared at its March session of 1925. The primer was intended for the Macedonian children in Aegean Macedonia.

If sixty years ago it took the Greek government less than three months to prepare and publish the Abecedar, then we must ask the question. Why was it that four years elapsed before the Greek government decided to take measures for the fulfillment of the obligations it undertook in 1920? That was the year the Charter of the League of Nations came into force — the League of Nations being the guarantee for the implementation of

the protection of the ethnic minority rights in the countries which signed the peace treaties after World War I; those treaties incorporated the conventions under which the signatory countries under took obligations of international character to protect the rights of their ethnic minorities.

The answer to this question is quite a long one. It also requires a survey of the events leading to this point in history.

First of all, since these conventions were not universal, the signatory countries opposed their fulfillment, particularly the Balkan states of which Macedonian people were a part (The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Bulgaria and Greece). The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and Bulgaria, argued that there was no minority living in the Vardar and Pirin Macedonia regions, for they considered Macedonians to be a part of their dominant nations.

The case of Aegean Macedonia in Greece was rather more specific. The Greek diplomacy could not state the same arguments since it was a Slav minority in question. Instead, they claimed that the said conventions did not obligate Greece because the Greek Parliament had not ratified the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, and besides, Greece was at war with Turkey. The Greek statesman also counted on moving the Macedonian ethnic minority out of Greece, in accordance with the Convention signed between Greece and Bulgaria in 1919, for the so-called "voluntary resettlement". This question was revived after the peace treaty of Lausanne in 1923, when the Convention for compulsory exchange of the minorities was signed between Greece and Turkey. Greece, however, could never really avoid the pressure exerted on its policy with regard to the protection of the Slav minority. This was not so much due to the conventions mentioned earlier, but rather to the fact that the movement of the population out of Greece was not such as they had planned, for a lot of people did not even think of leaving their homes, particularly the Macedonians from the west part of Macedonia. (This was also stated by Colonel Corfe, the League of Nations representative in the Mixed Greek-Bulgarian Commission for the exchange of the minorities). Besides, it was precisely these conventions that had created problems, in particular the Convention with Turkey, because the Greek government lacked finances to realize such a project, nor did it have sufficient land to resettle the people returning from Turkey. All this intensified the pressure on the Macedonians, the confiscation of their land and property, and opposition aimed at their resettlement, ultimately endangering their very existence.

This resulted in an increased number of complaints and appeals for intervention addressed to the League of Nations. The international community was informed of this as well. Thus, as Erick Colban, the director of the Department for Minorities at the Secretariat of the League of Nations so aptly put it. the "Macedonian tangle" was created.

For its intentional disregard of the protection of the Slav minority, Greece was singled out as the only state in the Balkans which still considered itself not bound by an international agreement to protect the ethnic minorities on its territory! The Greek diplomats turned down all suggestions (even those given by Erick Drummond, the

General Secretary of the League of Nations), that the Greek government should make a statement on the obligations it had undertaken and deliver a firm promise to take steps towards their realization in granting cultural autonomy to the ethnic minorities. However, as complaints about the treatment of the minorities in Greece in general, not just of the Slavs, became ever more frequent, and as the League of Nations became certain that the Greek government and the Greek politicians had no intention of putting the agreed clauses into effect, diplomatic pressure was exerted and the so-called "Small Protocols" (Politis — Kalfov) were signed; these were in fact almost a replica of the clauses already familiar from the peace treaties.

Indeed, the "Small Protocols" were also imposed on Greece, owing to the unyielding attitude of the allies with regard to the protection of the minorities by the signatory countries of the peace treaties after the Great War, and particularly because Greece used various excuses to evade the fulfillment of its international obligations.

However, produced in haste and only bilaterally, the "Small Protocols" soon proved to be a diplomatic failure, not only for the League of Nations headed by its General Secretary Erick Drumond, but also for the experienced British diplomacy which appointed this delicate diplomatic responsibility to Gilbert Murray, the South African Union representative who knew nothing of the situation in the Balkans and even less of the Macedonian question. The "Small Protocols" did not take into account the other "interested party" — the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (which was at that time spreading its propaganda among the Macedonians in an attempt at persuading them into becoming a "Serbian minority"). It even included negotiation with Greece concerning the free customs zone in Salonika and the future of the Gevgelija-Salonika railroad line which actually belonged to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In reply to the "Small Protocols",

The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes revoked the Pact on friendship with Greece! It soon became evident that the "Small Protocols" were "unrealistic". Furthermore, the refusal of the Greek government to ratify the Protocol containing obligations for Greece, made it clear that the whole project compromised the authority of the League of Nations and the diplomatic prestige of Great Britain. At this point the Protocols were placed in the charge of Austin Chamberlain, distinguished diplomat and Great Britain's Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as Chairman of the Council of the League of Nations. It was under his chairmanship that the Council of the League of Nations — at a time when the League of Nations and its executive bodies still had a substantial authority — at its session of March 1925, directed the Greek government to take all measures necessary to secure protection of the rights of the Macedonians as an ethnic minority in Aegean Macedonia.

Sir Austin Chamberlain was a political authority and a well informed diplomat familiar with the rivalry between the three Balkan states over Macedonia and its people. In dealing with the problem he undoubtedly took into consideration the reputation of the League of Nations, the interests of Great Britain in this region, and the opinions of other

politicians. What is more, at the March session in 1925, when talking about the national minority in Aegean Macedonia, he did not name them a "Bulgarian", or "Serbian" minority or "Greek-slovophones" — but for the first time and not at all incidentally he used the name "Slav speaking minority". It could have been a diplomatic "compromise" or it could have been something else (it might have been Gladstone's principle — Macedonia to Macedonians! — and it could have been the fact that a republican government was in power in Greece in contrast to the monarchy in Great Britain, or any other reason). This is still to be revealed one day when the documents — particularly the confidential ones — are brought to light. One thing we can be positive about, however, and that is the fact that the experienced British diplomat did this on the grounds of certain reality — that in the given case there was a nationality other than the Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek, with its linguistic individuality — a reality which was to eliminate any further confrontations and failures by the diplomats and the politicians of the League of Nations in this delicate matter.

At the session of March 1925 the Council of the League of Nations directed the Greek government to submit, within a period of less than three months, the replies to the following questions:

1. What had the Greek government done since 29 November 1924 (the date when the Protocols were signed — author's *note*)?;
2. What measures was the Greek government considering to take in the future for the fulfillment of the regulations on the protection of this minority? and
3. What, according to the Greek government, were the indispensable measures to be taken in view of the education and religious freedom of the Slav minority?

The obligations imposed on Greece by the Council of the League of Nations, were dictated by Sir Austin Chamberlain personally, who explicitly referred to the Macedonians as a "Slav speaking minority". The Greek government was to reply in the period from 2 April to 1 June. The fulfillment of a part of the obligations undertaken by the Greek government resulted in the publication of the *Abecedar* in May 1925.

Another moment of interest with regard to the history of the *Abecedar* is that in its correspondence with the League of Nations bodies and in its diplomatic correspondence, the Greek government adopted the new term, referring to the Macedonians not as "Greek-slovophones", not as a "Bulgarian" or "Serbian" minority, but as a Slav speaking minority, or Slav-Macedonians, while the language of this minority was referred to as Slav-Macedonian. It even seemed that the Council's attitude in this matter encouraged the Greek policy not only in adopting it but also in taking advantage of it in dealing with the Bulgarian propaganda among the Aegean Macedonians. Thus in the letter dated 29

May 1925, addressed to the Council of the League of Nations, the Greek government denies the Bulgarian government the right to be "directly or indirectly interested in the Slav speaking minority."

The treatment given to the Macedonians by the Council of the League of Nations made the Greek government take the course of a more realistic policy which among other things included instruction in the schools for the Macedonian minority in the language they spoke, or, more precisely in "Slav-Macedonian", as they referred to it. Therefore, that was also the language used in the *Abecedar*, the primer for the first grade of elementary school. The primer, made in the Latin alphabet, was then submitted to the League of Nations as a proof of the fulfillment of one of the obligations undertaken by the Greek government, with the assurances that schools with instruction carried out in Macedonian, intended for the Macedonian children in Aegean Macedonia, were to be opened in the following 1925/1926 school year.

This little primer we have now before us raised great interest at the time of its publication sixty years ago. On this occasion not only did the Balkan states but the entire world community paid its attention to the *Abecedar*, which was primarily evident in the League of Nations in Geneva.

The Bulgarian government, however, was unpleasantly surprised to see that it was published in Macedonian, and just as surprised were the Vrhovists circles of Macedonian emigrants in Bulgaria. It was obvious that nobody there expected this to happen — to have text books and instruction carried out in the Macedonian language. They protested in every possible way, for the interested circles in Bulgaria, headed by Alexander Tsankov's government, realized that the intention of the Greek government to open schools in Macedonian meant a serious blow to the positions gained by the Greater-Bulgarian propaganda and to the policy of the Bulgarian state in general towards the Macedonian question after the First World War. That is why the appearance of the *Abecedar* was followed by a strong reaction from the Bulgarian government at the League of Nations. On 15 October 1925, Mitkov, the Bulgarian diplomatic representative at the League of Nations expressed before Pablo de Askerate, the functionary of the League of Nations Secretariat, the disappointment caused by the appearance of the *Abecedar*, which, according to him, "made a disagreeable impression" in Bulgaria. Further on he said that the language of the primer was "a compilation of language elements of various villages", so that it would be "incomprehensible" to "a number of people in the area", (sic! What a glaring lie from a diplomat!) But the reaction in Bulgaria was not confined merely to diplomatic notes. They also intensified the attacks against the Macedonian language (or more precisely against the language used in the *Abecedar*), so that even the Bulgarian philosophers were engaged in challenging the existence of Macedonian. In the Bulgarian People's Assembly the loudest exponent of the Greater-Bulgarian aspirations, Dr Alexander Stambolov, raised his voice against it. The League of Nations received many petitions (organized by the Vrhovists circles) in which the *Abecedar* was criticized and attacked. Today we can take it as one more example of whose policy it was that was carried out and to what degree the Greater-Bulgarian policy was followed in its attempts at denationalization and assimilation of the Macedonian

people in Bulgaria between the two world wars. Dr Alexandar Stanishev even sent a cable to the League of Nations to say that "a Macedonian language does not exist", etc. These reactions against the publication of the Abecedar were actually aimed at preventing the establishment of the Macedonian language, because its further use, helped even by the Abecedar in Aegean Macedonia, would mean a serious blow to the San Stefano dreams and to the propaganda spread around that Macedonians were Bulgarians. Besides, the existence of the Macedonian language and schools in that language in Aegean Macedonia, would by analogy bring about the question of Macedonian language and schools and of cultural autonomy in general for the Macedonians in Bulgaria too, a matter already raised by the Macedonians in the Pirin part of Macedonia. This aspect of the Bulgarian reactions makes them interesting to us even today . . .

The Abecedar was met with great interest by the League of Nations, particularly with its Secretariat and the Department for minorities. Their experts on the language of the Slav minority engaged in scholarly discussions on whether it was possible to have instruction held in that language, and in establishing the differences between the Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek on the one side, and the Macedonian on the other. The alphabet was also an issue. But what is of particular significance to us is that Vasilis Dendramis, representative of the Greek government at the League of Nations, appeared before Erick Colban, the director of the Department for minorities at the Secretariat of the League of Nations, to explain and defend the publication of the Abecedar in the Macedonian language and to elucidate the attitude that the Macedonian language was neither Bulgarian nor Serbian. In the research concerning this issue we came across a document kept in the Archives of the League of Nations in Geneva. This was the letter by Dendramis to Erick Colban, dated November 10, 1925. Here are the most interesting parts of this letter:

"You told me that the Bulgarian press had recently started a severe campaign against the use of this kind of Latin alphabet. . . for the language which in Sofia they call — Bulgarian language . . . But —*there is a fact which is not less obvious and which is known to all the Slavists: the fact that the Slav-Macedonian is not identical with the Bulgarian language*". (In support of this claim Dendramis listed some of the distinguished Slavists such as Shafarik, the Macedonian Shapkarev, Novakovich, Yagich, Niderle and others, adding "... (even) the majority of notorious Bulgarophiles have, after many years of studying the problem, come to the conclusion that the Macedono-Slav language is neither Bulgarian, nor Serbian, but *an independent language . . .*" (underlined by V.K.)

Dendramis also encloses linguistic maps, as additional evidence for the independence of the Macedonian language, pointing out to Colleen that the creators of the maps located Macedonian as an independent language — the Slav-Macedonian as a separate language! He also adds the ethnic map of Eastern Europe, published in the "Daily Telegraph" series of maps, which has the Macedonians marked as a separate ethnic unit, as well as the map drawn by Vladimir Leontievich Komarov, the great Russian and later Soviet botanist, geographer and researcher (1869—1945), published

by the *BlagotvritelnoSlovensko Druzestvo* in Petersburg in which the "Macedonian Slavophones" are marked in a different way than the Bulgarians.

Dendramis's letter to Colban ends as follows: "As I have already said, this was done by a commission made of specialists who had decided to use in this Abecedar the language of the Slav-Macedonians, and a phonetic writing in the letters of Latin alphabet ana logical to those used by the Croats, Czechs, Slovenes and the Poles in their respective languages . . ." (United Nations Library iins Archives Geneva. R. 1975, Doc. *NO.* 41/47674/ 39349. (Sec V Dondramis's letter of 10 Nov. 1925')).

It doesn't happen often, but we do have here a Greek diplomat as a representative of the Greek go vernment appearing in the part of the defender of the existence of the Macedonian language and supporting with arguments the existence of the Macedonian Slav ethos.

The answer to the question as to why the Abecedar was published in the Latin alphabet can be found in the remark of O'Moligni — the authoritative expert in the Secretariat of the League of Nations who was in favour of the use of the Slav Cyrillic alphabet — who said that "the Greek government must have had some special reason in this case when deciding to use the Latin alphabet", because, "the fact that the Latin al phabet is used by the Croats, Slovenes and the Poles, as justified by Dendramis, does not explain the inten tion". "It would rather seem that the motives were political and that the Greek government had been anxi ous to get rid once and for all of the Slav influence of both the Serbian and the Bulgarian propaganda which would otherwise have continued in a new manner and would have threatened. . . and endangered the Greek sovereignty over Salonika." (United Nations Library and Archives Geneva, R. 1695, Dic. .No. 41/47674/ 39349, under Schools of Macedonia of the Abe cedar . . ., see Commentaries Minutes — O'Moligni, dated. 9 Dec. 1925.)

But, despite everything, the Abecedar never reached the Macedonian children. There were many reasons why the Greek government did not act in full accordance with the decisions of the Council of the League of Na tions in view of the use of the Abecedar. That is, with regard to the opening of schools in the Macedonian lan guage for the Macedonians in Aegean Macedonia. A part of them have been listed by Hristo Andonovski in the Foreword to this photoprint edition of the Abecedar.

Although obligated by international law to grant cultural autonomy to the Macedonians in Aegean Mace donia, the Greek government never took essential steps toward it; behind this was the fear of losing the poli tical positions in the country, so that the Greek politi cians and rulers persisted in trying to solve this problem through changing the composition of the population to the advantage of the Greek element. This was helped

by the work of the two Combined Commissions for the exchange of population — the Greek-Bulgarian and the Greek-Turkish. Besides, there were the rivalry and the propagandistic activities of official Sofia and official Belgrade among the Macedonian population in this part of the country. This was particularly intensive at this period

because of the negotiations between Athens and Belgrade on the free customs zone in Salonika and the ownership of the Gevgelija-Salonika railroad line.

The publication of the *Abecedar* in the Latin alphabet was a gamble, because, among other things, it also counted on the Macedonians' disliking such a primer, which indeed was the case in some circles ("What, **are** we going to be Catholics now?")

To all this we should add the difficult internal situation in Greece, with its economic and social problems. In an attempt to help resolve some of these the Government even invited Erick Colban, the Director of the Department for the Minorities at the League of Nations, to visit Athens. The invitation was accepted. In a situation like this, and with the purpose of avoiding the fulfillment of the obligations imposed on Greece, the Greek government resorted to its old methods and on 19 October 1925 provoked the well-known armed incident at Petrich (on the territory of Macedonia again), in order to avert the attention of the League of Nations and the international community to other things. In this manner, the conflict in Petrich came into focus, and the *Abecedar* and its fate were put aside to gradually fall into oblivion!

Notwithstanding the fact that it was not used, the appearance of the *Abecedar* was never a common episode in the history of the Macedonian people in Aegean Macedonia between the two world wars. It attracted the interest of the League of Nations and its experts and diplomats who found themselves in a situation in which they had to learn more about the question of the Macedonian language, its characteristics and the differences between the Macedonian and the Bulgarian or Serbian languages. The *Abecedar* also offered the opportunity to give evidence for the existence of the Macedonian Slav people, which was recognized by the bodies of the League of Nations as a "Slav speaking minority". In this respect it is of particular significance that it was a Greek diplomat who supplied the League of Nations with proof of the independence of not only the Macedonian language but of the Macedonian people, too. Proving, in other words, that the Macedonians belong to an independent nation. Vasilis Dendramis was also not alone in believing the facts revealed.

The *Abecedar* is also a testimony of the extent to which the Macedonian language had already developed at that time — sufficient for a textbook to be compiled and to be applied as a medium of instruction in schools. It possesses all necessary linguistic standards and forms for 1st grade primary school education, or more precisely, the sound method widely used in the primers for most of the languages of the time. The *Abecedar* deserves the attribute of a serious textbook of its kind which could withstand any linguistic and other criteria.

This primer is also a document for the history of the Macedonian language, its vocabulary and grammar. A student of Macedonian will find the devised "orthography" interesting, as well as the other linguistic solutions, the syntax, pronunciation, etc. In all respects, the *Abecedar* should be a subject of serious consideration of Macedonian studies, especially by linguists and historians. By doing this, more about the *Abecedar*, and, subsequently, the history of the Macedonian people can be discovered.

This is why we truly appreciate the initiative for the publication of the photoprint edition of the *Abece dar*. The reappearance of this first Macedonian primer will not only attract the attention and the interest of the scholarly circles but will also enable the young generations of Macedonians who were only taught in schools about the existence of this primer to really see it. The *Abece dar* was not as accessible when it existed only as a rare sample in the Library or as a document in the Archives of Macedonia.

We therefore welcome once again the reprint of this small book, bearing in mind that such small books have often raised enormous interest and thus gained particular significance. We are thankful to the initiators for the re-publication of the *Abece dar: the Macedonian Review*, the Archives of Macedonia — the institution which keeps the original edition and which enabled the research into its history; to Hristo Andonovski and Boris Vishinski who were also directly involved in the realization of the whole project.

Translated into English by Liubitsa Arsovska

Translation edited by Tom and Mary Petsinis

(*)Address delivered at the Archives of Macedonia on the occasion of the launching of the photo print edition of *Abece dar* on 15 January 1988.