

Interview with Dr. Stephan E. Nikolov (Bulgarian academy of sciences) about Macedonian-Bulgarian relationships



1. *M. Maleska: Mr. Nikolov, you published a text entitled “The Bulgaria obsession: Macedonia in the 20th century and Bulgarian Politics” as far back as 2001/2002 in the first issue of NBP. It’s been 13 years since. Is Macedonia still an obsession of Bulgarian politics? What are the priorities of Bulgaria today? What is its politics preoccupied with and where is its interest towards Macedonia in its agenda?*

The last foreign policy statements of the Bulgarian government before the pressure of mass protests appeared in the country showed clearly that Macedonia continues to be an obsession. This is so especially since the attitude towards present-day Macedonians, imposed as a dogma, is an attitude towards people who have forgotten their Bulgarian origins and who will one day “return” as the prodigal son. Unfortunately, this position is shared by scientists, especially historians, who are dogmatically attached to the concept of invariability of ethnic identity, believing its roots are deep in antiquity and that it is resistant to historical changes, which have caused long-lasting interruptions and lack of a feeling of belonging to a state – undoubtedly the most powerful factor of nation creation, then falling under strong influence of the neighboring countries, which have occasionally ruled over the territories and population that now belong to both states, as well as continual coexistence with people of many various ethnic backgrounds (tribes, peoples), religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds. It is impossible here to explain thoroughly these positions, but if I only limit myself to the relations of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the Bulgarian communities behind the border, I can mention the lack of consistency, being prone to long-lasting prejudices and stereotypes, as well as belonging to a group, including belonging to a party. The Bulgarian policy towards the Republic of Macedonia is largely based on, even if that is not always publicly stated, a hesitant understanding that this is almost “a second Bulgaria”

and a Bulgarian community unjustly cut off from “mother Bulgaria”. This leads to mutual mistrust and certainly hampers the development of the business, cultural, political relations between Sofia and Skopje. On the other hand, along with the limited resources of Bulgaria, this chaotic policy is detrimental to the Bulgarian communities elsewhere in the world, especially the Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, where they are more numerous, but also to the newer emigrants from the last few decades (according to different assessments, their number is about one million Bulgarians in the active age), which Bulgaria does not treat in a completely fair way, and this leads to complete break with their connections with Bulgaria and closing the perspectives of their return to the country which has fallen into a serious demographic crisis.

2. *M. Maleska: How strong is the anti-Macedonianism in Bulgaria today, and who are its supporters? What is its purpose today and who does it serve?*

I do not like the term “Macedonianism”, and I don’t like the notions that start with “anti-”. The situation in the Bulgarian-Macedonian relations – I do not take into consideration only the political, but also the cultural and interpersonal ones – is a result and a consequence of the complex historical processes on the Balkans throughout the centuries. Neither were the ancient Macedonians molded into modern Macedonians, nor did the Thracians and Slavs peacefully wait for the cavalry of Asparuh to come from somewhere, so that they can joyfully give up the language and identity and turn into the present-day Bulgarians. This is what they taught us and they still teach this in the history textbooks, and if it wasn’t tragic it would really be comical. Other peoples don’t face such a situation frequently to have their brothers and cousins oppose each other in war. Here there are many such examples. And here we are talking not about mobilized soldiers but colonels and generals – some with stars and insignia of one country, others – of another country. These are not alchemy products of some infernal laboratory, but living people, who remember their parents and grandfathers, have common properties – but have found themselves on two sides of the border and have replaced the suffixes on their second names, even their whole names. Have you heard of any Greek who has become a Turk or Bulgarian? (yes, there may be individual examples, mostly because of a woman, but as we sociologists say, they can be statistically neglected). If we start looking at who did something wrong, who is a traitor or deserter – we will not achieve anything, and we are actually stuck in a dead-end. The politicians need all these “anti” and devilish stereotypes

and prejudices connected to them, because they only care about today, about the present elections, using the practical opportunities. They are only for internal political use.

3. *M. Maleska: Your story of how you have become familiar with Macedonia and how you came to love it is interesting. It was through literature?*

For better or for worse – I’m convinced that it is for the better – many, perhaps most Bulgarians have relatives Macedonians –whether they are from Blagoevgrad (Gorna Gjumaja), Bansko or Petric, whether they are moving from Thessalonica, Drama, Kukush, Skopje, Ohrid... On everyday interpersonal level – and according to me that is the authentic one, unchanged, which has survived during the political and historical turning points – nobody understands them as “alien”, “other”, non-Bulgarians. However, it is normal for this context to add something for the multitudinous Macedonian character, but this does not surpass the frames of the stereotypical regional ethnographic characteristics – such as “Vraca woman”, “Pernik-ian”, “thrifty as though from Gabrovo”, etc. This cannot be compared to the clear difference that exists towards the “others”, with whom we live together on a common territory, and they are frequently even our relatives, such as the Armenians, Jews, Greeks (who have come as political emigrants after the civil war in Greece), the numerous “Russian daughters-in-law” brought by those who worked in the former USSR (regardless of whether they were Russians, Ukrainians or even Uzbeks), and a smaller number of Vlachs and Karakachans – rather successfully blended in.

I do not possess a blood relation with the “Macedonians” – these are the circumstances. My brother’s wife is a “Macedonian”, but she could as well have been from Pleven or from Burgas – mysterious are the ways of love alchemy. My mother is from a village close to Sofia, now already part of the city, and my father from Caribrod, which since 1919 has been a part of Serbia (the Kingdom of SCS, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, FNRJ, SFRJ...) and is now officially called Dimitrovgrad. This circumstance has made me realize since I was little the meaning and damnation of the abstract notion of “state border”. I mean, we are completely “Shopi” – integral and indisputable element of the Bulgarian ethnic and linguistic family, contrary to the attempts of some greater Serbian geographers and ethnographers to include the Shopi into the category of “Eastern Serbs”.

I became familiar with Macedonia when my mother took me with her on a business trip to Blagoevgrad, when I was about 9-10 years old. I do not remember anything about the

city, except for the hotel which in the spirit of political correctness had the unnatural name of “Volga”. But I strongly remembered a concert of the young State Ensemble of Macedonian Songs and Orasⁱ (later “Macedonian” was omitted from the name – so as not to carry any separatist implications).

I am a city boy, we did not listen to folk music at home very much, and even the modest versions broadcast on the radio hardly attracted me. I don’t know whether it was because it was a real novelty for me to watch and listen to a concert in a hall, with lights that changed and stadium lights, loud live music, drums, bagpipes, some very unusual instruments such as zurnas, or for some other reason, but it overwhelmed me. I remembered the soft slightly hoarse voice of the then young Ilija Argirov and it all impressed me with vivid childhood memories.

My second, even more impressive, encounter which shaped my spirit was with the works of Dimitar Talev, especially his novel *The Iron Candlestick*. I have gained my whole idea of the Bulgarian (I’m not afraid of that word) Revival from there – not from the textbooks and history books, and not from another novel from that time. It made a great impression, I was shaken by the habits, customs, traditions and rules – the patriarchal family, but not completely patriarchal either due to the strong role of the oldest woman in the family community, by the codex of honor of the city craftsmen community, from the church canon, which covered everything, the rules of fresco-painting in the church, to the sinful love between young rebels... And the characters, the strong characters of Lazar Glaushev, Sultana, Katerina, Nija, Rafe Klinche, in the imaginary town of Prespa – in fact a completely realistic representation of Prilep, Talev’s birth place, and very similar to dozens of Balkan towns that were waking up – Koprivshtica, Karlovo, Bitola, Kukush, Prizren, Mostar... I was also greatly influenced by the film *Ikonoostasot* (Iconostasis), made on the basis of the novel. According to the power of the influence on my personal growth and my idea of the Balkans, I can compare Talev’s novels only with those of Ivo Andric.

However, something that I found out much later and that constructed my full picture is even more tragic and full of symbolism – was that Talev wrote these novels as an immigrant in the town of Lukovit, far away from his native Pelagonia, Vardar, Shar Mountain, which he would not see to the end of his life. Even more, it was only the coincidence or the vision – depending on how one understands it – encouraged him to write those fantastic pages. And he could have written a lot more, if he was not imprisoned in the

labour camp “Kucijan” by the Bulgarian communist authorities because of “greater Bulgarian chauvinism”. According to the shocking writings of one of the inmates, the norms were too difficult for him, because his physical condition was bad and he was unprepared for the difficult work with shovel and spade. According to him, the other inmates, who knew very well who Talev was, fulfilled his norm, so that he would not die of exhaustion or from a bullet of the sadistic guards, which was something that was happening to other “rotten intellectuals”. One night the inmates were woken up to take out a wagon load of coal. There was no light. Suddenly the spade of the author (the inmate who wrote about this) hit something soft. When they dug it up, they found Talev buried under the coal, and miraculously one inmate-doctor managed to save his life.

I was lucky to visit Macedonia when it was a federative Yugoslav republic when I was a pupil. It was my first travel abroad. When the bus was parked in Skopje, I saw the plaque on the street. At first, I shivered – I am abroad and the name is Bulgarian. But no... not “Братя Миладинови”, but “Браќа Миладиновци”... that small “ќ” with hardly visible tail above changed my perception, I soon realized that these are the same people from the portraits of my textbooks, but different... Like most of my peers until that moment I thought of Macedonia as an indivisible part of Bulgaria, I was drawing in the atlas the map of Bulgaria together with Macedonia... Not any more since that moment. And in fact it would be the best for all of us if the border could disappear and if the problem of identity and loyalty would remain only a product of the conviction and understanding of every one of us.

4. *M. Maleska: Why does Bulgaria need recognition of the Bulgarian minority? What is expected of this policy? Isn't it usual to require reciprocity: recognition of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria?*

I am strongly convinced that because of the borders between the Balkan states, which are artificially imposed and willfully changed, it was impossible for a section of the population not to remain on the other side of the border from where the majority is, despite the painful processes for forceful or agreed exchanges of population. Technically, especially after the First World War, when the contemporary borders of Bulgaria were almost definitely shaped, there was a smaller probability that compact masses of Serbian, Greek or Roman population would remain in Bulgaria, because by the force of the international agreements, the borders

are changed at the expense of the territories with which Bulgaria ruled until then, but the general principle is valid.

The case with the Macedonians is more specific. When Bulgaria emerged as a state in the late nineteenth century, its territory was defined within the range according to the San Stefano peace treaty between the Sublime Porte (Turkey) and Russia who have followed the negotiated terms by the Constantinople ambassadors' conference in 1876. Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece after the Balkans' and the World War I divided between themselves the disputed territory, called for convenience, not as a successor to an earlier existing state unit according to international legal instruments, Macedonia. Its population in Bulgaria is referred to as Bulgarians in Greece - as Greeks, and Serbia – as Serbians, with all the consequences for particular individuals as work restrictions, prohibiting the use of spoken language, so to open terror, persecution, expulsions, incarceration and bearings and even murdering of highly disobedient ones. After the Second World War, a specific, even unusual situation happens. Bulgaria becomes a Republic in 1946, which does not change its status of a legal successor of the state (The Kingdom of Bulgaria), an ally of Germany, Italy and Japan, which were defeated in the war (the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo axis). In accordance with the Agreement between Rome and Berlin, the Bulgarian army and civil servants were sent to the parts of Yugoslavia and Greece occupied by Wehrmacht. Specifically, a process of “re-Bulgarianization” starts in Macedonia, which was till then a southern Serbian county. After the Bulgarian units were extracted and after the redistribution of the Yugoslav partisan war, Macedonia (its Vardar part) receives a status of one of the six republics, a part of people's (later socialist) Yugoslavia. The word “българин” (б'лгарин or бугарин) receives a negative connotation, a synonym for fascist and occupier, and those who identified themselves as Bulgarians were tortured and persecuted. But what causes most interest is that a completely identical process, directly managed from ВКР and МВР, is taking place in southwest Bulgaria: south from the arbitrarily drawn line, which passed north of Blagoevgrad, the population without the Romas, Turks and Bulgarian Muslims, was administratively named Macedonians. The secret archives that were discovered in the recent years contain horrifying evidence of the resistance against the abovementioned “self-identification” – statements and complaints by local party secretaries and militia superintendents, that on the one hand the party members, not necessarily on their own will, obey the directives and instructions, and on the other hand those who are not members of the party massively refuse to be recorded as Macedonians,

even if they are beaten up or expelled from work. The pupils complain that they hardly understand what their teachers sent from Macedonia lecture to them, there was not a sufficient number of subscribers to *Nova Makedonija*, and the papers in the shops had no buyers. There are curious moments, such as the case with the Russian emigrant *beloguardian*ⁱⁱ from the city of Sandanski, who was recorded as a Macedonian only because he did not belong to the exceptions that were stated in the instructions. At the same time, the refugees from Greece who declared they had Bulgarian identity due to the civil war, regardless of their wish, were sent by trucks to be delivered to the Yugoslav authorities, and after the 'Informbureau' they were sent as far away as possible – to Prague, Warsaw, even Tashkent, anywhere but to Bulgaria.

These are facts from authentic documents, which could not be forged as they were confidential, and for many years they were locked in the secret archives. It is also a fact that this policy was formed under a strict control (at this point, I'm not even talking about dictate from Moscow or Belgrade, which is proven by the drastic change of that policy when the relations between Stalin and Tito deteriorated, so that in one of the later marches which sings of Tito, Stalin, Dimitrov, the name of the first one is omitted). G. Dimitrov itself, together with Anton Yugov, Vladimir Poptomov, whose power greatly surpassed their formal party and state duties, have Macedonian origin in accordance with the stipulated criteria, but there is no single document kept where they have signed themselves as something other than Bulgarians. For the common people from Pirin, up to 1960, when a new stage of more active "re-Bulgarization" started and a much more firm policy towards the minorities, there was a graph "nationality" in the identification cards, where it was obligatory to write "Bulgarian". For example, such a Macedonian was the now no longer living professor Zivko Oshavkov, founder of the modern Bulgarian sociology (born in Debar in 1913, died in Sofia in 1982).

If I am to formulate concisely and clearly my personal opinion as a scientist and civilian, the problem of self-identification is a matter of choice for every one of us, a choice, which is influenced by the environment – the family environment above all, i.e. the memory of the blood relations. Subjective convictions are also possible – there are enough examples when an individual, regardless of his/her secondary gender/sexual characteristics, expresses a strong tendency towards the characteristic behavior or the opposite sex. But it must not be allowed for anyone from "above" – let alone external forces – to impose on whole groups of population and every citizen individually what his or her identity will be. As far as the

concrete frames of the issue are concerned – yes, even if there is one single man in Bulgaria who considers himself a Macedonian, he has the unconditional right to express that and no influence should be imposed on his rights as a human and as a citizen. The same is true for any Bulgarian in Macedonia. Unfortunately, both governments, in Sofia and Skopje, are very far from such understanding and they prefer to play on the ethnic card.

The reciprocity represents a balanced approach, established on mutual estimation and understanding – empathy! On the Balkans, unfortunately with all heavy consequences from it, this approach is not known yet, and it is even rejected as “alien to the traditions”! Some time ago, we encountered again this problem, when there was certain hope for resolving the difficult Kosovo problem between Pristina and Belgrade. The main reason for the rejection of Pristina to accept the request for full political autonomy of the four Serbian communities in Northern Kosovo, where the Serbians are majority – or give legal and executive authority in the area of jurisdiction and internal affairs and above all – under the strict control of Belgrade. On that occasion, one of the most prominent leaders of the Bulgarians in Bosilegrad Ivan Nikolov (he is not my relative!) commented: “Can you imagine what would happen if someone asked for the judges and chiefs of police in Bosilegrad and Tzaribrod to be appointed from Sofia?! I know what would happen (we would not fit in the Serbian prisons), but I do not know what kind of a political moral is to ask for yourself what you don’t want to give to others?! That is why I think that the Serbs in Kosovo should get as many rights as Belgrade gave to the Bulgarians in Serbia”. I can add another new detail – in these circumstances the Serbian authorities annulled the voting posts of the Serbian citizens at the parliamentary elections scheduled for 12 May this year outside the Bulgarian Embassy in Belgrade and the general consulate in Nis.

5. *M. Maleska: In the text I mentioned, you talk about the research of NCPOR, according to which most citizens of Bulgaria do not have a clear idea of the VMRO organization. What is the present situation like? How is the phenomenon of the existence of a Macedonian minority and its organizations in Bulgaria explained, regardless of the number?*

At the present moment, the party VMRO – Bulgarian national movement (VMRO-BND) is a clearly profiled political structure, although it is not among the main political

players in Bulgaria. In several instances, it manages to get several MPs in the coalition with the other parties. Its leader Krasimir Karakachanov effectively dealt not only with his competitors for the position, but also despite pretensions for connections with the historical VMRO, especially Todor Aleksandrov and Vancho Mihajlov, he managed to remove all those who were linked to that organization or their successors, such as Ivan Tatarchev, Rajna Drangova, Stojan Bojadziev, and others. Despite its strives for something more, the party has positions mainly in the local government in the whole state, including mayors in some smaller communities. The internal crises, secessions, revealing Karakachanov as a collaborator of the state security, as well as his readiness to enter the government in coalition with BSP and the blood enemy – the “Turkish” DPS – led to “Ataka” taking the place of VMRO-BND as a basic nationalistic party. VMRO-BND is frequently linked to organizations with extreme rightist and neo-Nazi views and activities, such as the Bulgarian national alliance (BNS) and branch of the neo-Nazi organization “Blood and honor”. Publically, the leadership of VMRO-BND categorically distances itself from the national-socialist ideology, stating that they are essentially patriots. But the anti-European and xenophobic statements of Karakachanov, and especially of the councilor in the Sofia municipality Angel Dzambaski for getting out of NATO and EU, expulsion of the “foreign monopoly” or displacement of the “Gypsies” compete with the rhetoric of Volen Siderov. VMRO-BND and “Ataka” could not agree on a joint nationalistic platform for early elections on 12 May this year. While “Ataka” is the great winner of the protest wave in the country and will probably win 25-30 MPs in the new parliament, VMRO-BND will continue to act as an extra-parliamentary party.

In its essence, VMRO-BND is a party through the whole country and at the same time – anti-Macedonian in its character. In 1990, VMRO-BND (then VMRO-SMD) supported Macedonia’s secession from the Yugoslav federation and its independence. But it firmly believes that the Republic of Macedonia is only unjustly separated from the Bulgarian territory, that the Macedonians are Bulgarians, and the Macedonian language is nothing but a dialect of the Bulgarian. It retains relations with similar organizations in the Republic of Macedonia, such as VMRO-Tatkovinska of Dimitar Crnomarov and VMRO-Ohrid of Vladimir Paunkovski. But the main position of this party is directed towards rejection of any mentioning of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, let alone its recognition, as well as ban not only on political representation of the people and communities with Macedonian self-awareness, but also on cultural forms of activity.

6. *M. Maleska: Are there economic interests behind the demand for good neighborly relations?*

The good neighborly relations between two countries are always first and foremost economic. This is especially true of the present situation and is a priority when it comes to relatively small and poor countries. Bulgaria does not even have the potential of Greece, which does not belong to the more significant economic entities in Europe, and has been going through a serious financial crisis in the last few years. If what is meant by “economic interests” is proactive policy of the Bulgarian companies, serious investments or exploitation of the Macedonian economic resources and natural riches, then this cannot happen. And it hasn’t happened for more than 20 years since the Republic of Macedonia has become an independent state. The business exchange is insignificant, the investments and common economic projects are very small in scale. A sad symbol of the situation of the economic relations with the Republic of Macedonia is the railway Sofia-Skopje, whose construction has not advanced from the dead point between Gjushevo and Kriva Palanka in spite of the accessible European money. It does not fit the needs and the road: taking into account the border control according to the standards from the past century (“everybody out with your luggage”), the bus passes the 220 kilometers between Sofia and Skopje in five hours, which is not explainable for Europe in XXI century.

The modern state has at its disposal small-scale possibilities to affect the economic activity, including foreign trade and joint production enterprises. Whether the joint productions will be realized or not depends mostly on the private economic interests, the distribution on the markets of other countries, trade exchange, labor force movement and tourist flows. There is no lack of opportunities in this respect having in mind the close economic characteristics, and common or complementary branches (agriculture, food production, wine production, tourism, construction). What presents serious obstacles to the development of the economic cooperation is the lack of or the bad transport infrastructure, political insecurity and the existing prejudices, as well as corruption, slow state bureaucracy and inefficient judicial system. All in all, the dilemma is whether the fear of competition will be overcome, and whether joint usefulness will be discovered.

7. *M. Maleska: How do you view the statements of the existence of Bulgaro-phobia in Macedonia? Since you have come to Macedonia several times, how have you felt that there are prejudices towards the Bulgarians, if there are any?*

Personally, I haven't encountered directly instances of Bulgaro-phobia, if we put aside an attempt of some Macedonian colleagues not to allow me to write articles about Macedonia and the Macedonians for an American encyclopedia. It was not because I am not an expert or because I have shown some kind of prejudice or biased relation, but because I am a Bulgarian – i.e. it is almost a blasphemy for a Bulgarian to write about Macedonia. This is not permissible for an academic approach. The problems that have remained from the past, the frequently opposed interpretations of the same events will not be overcome soon and no common explanations will be found for them. But it is precisely the intellectuals, as well as the businessmen, who should not wait for that indeterminate future. It is important that the presence of Bulgarian and Macedonian representatives on international forums is not a cause for tensions and lack of readiness to sit down on the same table, rejecting attitude towards formulations that are considered unacceptable for the other side. I have always said – the fact that we can understand each other well enough without the mediation of a third language or translator is an enormous advantage, and not an obstacle for communication. Of course, I am still hurt and it is not natural that a film or a literary work can still cause disturbances on the highest level in the relations between the two countries; also, when Bulgarian in Macedonia is a synonym of fascist, occupier, "Tatar" – in general, an offensive term, as are Macedonian ("make") and Macedonia in Bulgaria. We can't keep on apologizing that this language of hatred is typical of football fans and hooligans, of insufficiently educated and blinded nationalists.

Let me finish with a few extracts from the text of my brother Kalin Nikolov, dedicated to our grandfather – one of those tens of thousands of victims of the geopolitical oppositions, conflicts and border changes. Not because he is my grandfather, but exactly as an example that even in the darkest of times and challenges, the imposed suffering must not grow into hatred for the "other" – who is an enemy or torturer because of the momentary situation. I'm certain that many will recognize in this description "the collective memory of their own kind filled with traumas, so typical of the Balkans, where there almost isn't any person whose grandfathers have not suffered the most difficult consequences of the military-political

conflicts, ethnic cleansing, assimilations and displacements – everything that in the international and political lexicology has entered under the heading of “balkanization”.

“When my grandfather (*Stefan Nikolov Stamenov –Baron*) died, in the summer of 1978, I think that everyone with origins from Caribrod (*In 1919, according to the Treaty of Neuilly, Caribrod was given to the newly established Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. In 1949, with a decree of J. B. Tito it was renamed Dimitrovgrad in honor of Dimitrov, but very few of those who are connected to this town call it by that new name. In the last decades, despite the demands of the local population, expressed through a referendum, the former name of the town was not returned. my note, SN*) who lived in Sofia came to pay tribute to him. It was a long row of people, heirs, close and distant... Then I heard something from my father, when he received condolences: “That is our destiny – to lay down in a foreign land”. Land in Sofia and Bulgaria as well, but alien as well, not there in the cemetery over the native town ... In fact, this was the fate of many of these people as I do and the son of Pop (rev.) Apostol Apostolov, Anta. Embittered by the political reality, the former head of the local “Momchil vojvoda” partisan unit bought a place near Kalotina where from to set eyes on his native land, inaccessible to him, and he died there in loneliness ...

The paradox was that even buried, my grandfather was not given to rest in peace. We received a shocking letter, none of us had ever heard of such a thing! “*In accordance with the confirmation for inheritors’ number 1780 from 10 August 1987, Stefan Nikolov Stamenov was illegitimately buried in place number 14, line 6, grave 7, because he is not a first-line inheritor. It is necessary that he be exhumed and removed as soon as possible... Superintendent: Harizanova, technical manager Ivanova*”.

My father, confused, went to the municipality of Sofia to ask for protection and unexpectedly someone stopped him – “Aren’t you one of Stefan Nikolov’s sons?” They started a conversation. The man understood that we come for help to “exhume” ” the father and read the incredible document – it hasn’t been even a week since the funeral. He entered somewhere angrily and furiously. After some time, he brought a resolution that the first Socialist *kmet* (Mayor) of several of the oldest regions of the capital can rest in peace in his grave, and Sofia Municipality undertakes all costs made by the inheritors... It turned out there was still good sense after all! In this that alien, in Sofia, unlike that on the alert relative... Alien, yet Bulgarian land, has bowed over his forehead in front the still worthy to

be memorized forgotten man. Maybe that is why we have the saying that no one is a prophet in his hometown?

Another similar letter is kept. He was not allowed in the organization of the active fighters against fascism in Bulgaria. He was categorically refused affiliation because his activity was assessed as unsatisfying. If we take into consideration that precisely the Bulgarian anti-fascists are fiction which greatly believe they are reality, his absence thereof from today's perspective can be considered recognition and honor.

The narrated history can remind us of unpleasant, fierce years, but it can also remind us of rarely dignified people. The history of Bulgaria must not neglect the political heroic act of B. Pavlovic (*Bozidar Pavlovic – Serbian country administrator of Caribrod and the surrounding areas. In the beginning of October 1932 – accidentally, it was exactly 20 years before I was born – after a terrorist act – explosion on the train for Belgrade – about 1000 Bulgarians from there were arrested. My grandfather and another Bulgarian, MP in the Serbian parliament, as most prominent representatives of the local population, were questioned by two colonels, who threatened them with death if they do not betray the terrorists. The officers ignored Pavlovic's attempt to stop the willfulness. During the night, he managed to get connected with the President of the Government Zivkovic in Belgrade, who ordered that the investigation is changed into a civil procedure, which saved many from the inevitable persecution.* my note, SN), without whose strives there would be victims among the people in the camp of Zeljusha. This Serb, true European, did not view the things on the Balkans as already drawn in advance by the wild heart of different chauvinist ideas and national incites. He did not consider solutions with the use of the steel fist, i.e. blood and death...

Similarly to most of the names from this story, towns and villages, factories and streets were named according to some of them, and then they were erased, in some cases justifiably, in some cases unjustifiably, with underestimation of all they have done. However, there are such who should be remembered and who will not be forgotten, even when the fog around us speaks differently...

I hope that my grandfather will be such a man.”

ⁱ Oro is a folk dance.

ⁱⁱ Member of the Imperial Russian Army, which fought against the “Red” Bolsheviks in the civil war after the Russian revolution in 1917.

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