

ABSTRACT

Title: BULGARIA'S MACEDONIA: NATION-BUILDING AND STATE BUILDING, CENTRALIZATION AND AUTONOMY IN PIRIN MACEDONIA, 1903-1952

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This dissertation explores the intersection between rival forms of consciousness in Pirin Macedonia: national and local, from the anti-Ottoman Ilinden Uprising in Macedonia in 1903 to the end of the Communist “Macedonianization” campaign in 1952. Bulgarian, Macedonian and English-language historiographies have each portrayed this period as one in which a centralized state extended its power into the region and codified a Bulgarian national consciousness among its inhabitants. This dissertation finds that a rival, local consciousness existed through this period as well. The inability of the Bulgarian state in 1878 to secure the annexation of all geographic Macedonia, however, had led in the late nineteenth century to the emergence of a local paramilitary organization, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO).

VMRO is generally portrayed as a nationalist organization. But in leading Macedonians within a struggle against first the Ottoman Empire, then against Greece, Serbia (later, Yugoslavia) and even factions within Bulgaria, it provided an alternative experience of mobilization. The Organization took on functions of the state, able to do this as the Bulgarian state was weakened by internal crises and external enemies. This period thus saw a lengthy struggle between VMRO and the central state to consolidate

control over Pirin, a conflict that continued between local elites and the state even after the paramilitary organization was driven underground in 1934.

The “Macedonian Question” has been portrayed as a wedge issue by which external actors — particularly the Communist International, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany — could seek to divide Southeastern Europe. This dissertation goes farther in arguing that Macedonia was a divisive issue within national politics as well. Even in the post-1934 *Zveno* and royal dictatorships, then the Communist-dominated regime after 1944, Pirin remained a divisive issue and one in which a weak central state was forced to find compromise with local interests. The “Macedonianization” campaign that followed the Second World War was the vehicle by which Pirin was subordinated to the Bulgarian state. As such, the campaign appears less as a Soviet-directed campaign for the benefit of Yugoslavia, and more as a means by which Sofia was able to establish control over the district.

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CENTRALIZATION AND AUTONOMY IN PIRIN MACEDONIA, 1903-1952

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Transliteration

Transliterating Bulgarian and Macedonian sources poses certain challenges, not simply in terms of linguistics but in terms of politics. Transliterating a term or proper name in a specific fashion can be interpreted as showing preference for contemporary national claims: e.g., *Makedonija* suggests *Македонија*, *Makedoniiā* suggests *Македония*.

I use here similar methods of transliteration for Macedonian and Bulgarian. In terms of toponyms I transliterate the contemporary language of the contemporary state. Wherever possible I use the appropriate historical name unless the place name has entered common English usage (e.g., Nevrokop rather than Gotse Delchev, Skopje rather than Uskub or Skopiia, and Sofia rather than Sofiia). In terms of proper names, for purposes of standardization I use Bulgarian transliteration for names before 1948, but use the appropriate transliteration when referring to proper names after that period. While imperfect, I find it the most reasonable compromise. All transliteration of the titles and authors of non-English books and articles in Cyrillic follow transliteration as per the language of authorship (e.g., *Sofija* instead of *Sofiia* when transliterated from a Macedonian text, *Skopia* instead of *Skopje* when transliterated from a Bulgarian text), except where an author has transliterated their own name differently.

Macedonian

A, а	A	J, ј	Y	T, т	T
Б, б	B	К, к	K	Ќ,ќ	Kj
В, в	V	Л, л	L	У, у	U
Г, г	G	Љ, љ	Lj	Ф, ф	F
Д, д	D	М, м	M	Х, х	H
Е, е	E	Н, н	N	Ц, ц	Ts
Ѓ, ѓ	Gj	Њ, њ	Nj	Ч, ч	Ch
Ж, ж	Zh	О, о	O	Џ, џ	J
З, з	Z	П, п	P	Ш, ш	Sh
S, s	Dz	R, р	R		
И, и	I	C, с	S		

Bulgarian

A, а	A	Л, л	L	Ц, ц	Ts
Б, б	B	М, м	M	Ч, ч	Ch
В, в	V	Н, н	N	Ш, ш	Sh
Г, г	G	О, о	O	Щ, щ	Sht
Д, д	D	П, п	P	Ђ, џ	U
Е, е	E	Р, р	R	Ю, ю	Io (but Yo when beginning a proper name)
Ж, ж	Zh	С, с	S		
З, з	Z	Т, т	T	Я, я	Ia (but Ya when beginning a proper name)
И, и	I	У, у	U		
Й, ѹ	I	Ф, ф	F	Ђ, џ	Ia or E
К, к	K	Х, х	H		

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List of Abbreviations

	<u>Original</u>	<u>Translation (if non-English)</u>
BKP	<i>Bulgarska komunisticheska partia</i>	Bulgarian Communist Party
BRP	<i>Bulgarska rabotnicheska partia</i>	Bulgarian Worker's Party (Name of BKP 1938-48).
BZNS	<i>Bulgarski Zemedelski Naroden Siuoz</i>	Bulgarian Agrarian National Union
ELAS	<i>Ethnikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos</i>	National Popular Liberation Army
KPM	<i>Komunisticka partija na Makedonija</i>	Communist Party of Macedonia
KPY	<i>Komunistička partija Jugoslavije</i>	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
MOO	<i>Makedonski-odrinski opulchenie</i>	Macedonian Volunteer's Corps
MVRNZ	<i>Ministerstvo na vutreshnite raboti i narodnoto zdrave</i>	Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration	
NRB	<i>Narodna repulika na Bulgaria</i>	People's Republic of Bulgaria
NRM	<i>Narodna republika na Makedonija</i>	People's Republic of Macedonia
ODAB	<i>Okruzhniyat durzhaven arhiv, Blagoevgrad</i>	District state archive, Blagoevgrad
OPAB	<i>Okruzhniyat partichen arhiv, Blagoevgrad</i>	District party archive, Blagoevgrad
OF	<i>Otechestven front</i>	Fatherland Front
TsDA	<i>Tsentralen durzhaven arhiv</i>	Central State Archive
VMRO	<i>Vutreshna Makedonska Revolutsionna Organizatsiya</i>	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization
VMK	<i>Vurhoven Makedonski Komitet</i>	Supreme Macedonian Committee

Introduction

Defining Macedonia

We are suffering from our Balkan [inferiority] complexes together. (...) Sofia is sulking over its lost glory, while Skopje has doubts about its independent identity - hence the swaggering and swashbuckling on both sides...

-- 24 Chasa¹

On September 18, 2004, a minor protest erupted in Blagoevgrad, the regional capital of Blagoevgrad province (*oblast*)². The *oblast* constitutes the Pirin region, or *Pirinski krai*,³ that part of geographic Macedonia included within the boundaries of the Republic of Bulgaria.⁴ A delegation from the Republic of Macedonia composed of elderly retirees arrived in Blagoevgrad. During a brief ceremony in the afternoon, the visiting group laid a wreath of flowers on the Gotse Delchev monument (*pametnik*) in Macedonia Square (*Ploshtad*

¹ 24 Chasa, May 12, 1997, 12.

² There are several possible translations of *oblast*, overlapping with other administrative terms. In this study, *oblast* is translated as province, *okolia* as district, *okrug* as county and *obshtina* as municipality.

³ Throughout this study I use Pirin to refer to the region rather than to the mountain that gives the region its name. The term is also used interchangeably with *Pirinski krai* (Bulgarian for “Pirin region”) and Pirin Macedonia.

⁴ There are few easy definitions for Macedonia, and the term “geographic Macedonia” is used for convenience. I follow Duncan Perry and H.R. Wilkinson’s formulation that “Macedonia is roughly that territory which lies between the Shar and Osogov Mountains in the north, the Pindus mountains, the Bistritsa River... and the Aegean Sea in the south, the lower Mesta and the Rhodope Mountains in the east, and the Albanian highlands in the west.” Today, these territories lie in three states: Bulgaria (“Pirin Macedonia”), Greece (“Aegean Macedonia”) and the Republic of Macedonia (“Vardar Macedonia”), as illustrated by Figure 9 on page 158 of this study. See Duncan Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Liberation Movements, 1893-1903* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), 12-13. See also H.R. Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool: University Press, 1951), 1-3.

Makedoniiia). Delchev is a nineteenth-century figure revered as a national hero in both Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia for his role (and death at a young age) in the fight against the Ottoman Empire for local autonomy and rights. Ceremonies at the site are common events, and usually not controversial. The commemoration on September 18 by non-Bulgarian citizens proved otherwise.

Figure 1
The Gotse Delchev Monument, Blagoevgrad



The Gotse Delchev monument as symbolic space in May 2005. Note the memorial wreaths, used to commemorate both anniversaries of Macedonian historical events and Bulgarian state holidays.

Local members of the conservative national political party VMRO-SMD⁵ waiting nearby immediately contested the right of the Macedonian delegation to make use of the Gotse Delchev monument and the history it represented. Mounting the steps underneath the statue and its plinth, VMRO-SMD members unfurled Bulgarian and party flags. Members climbed up the steps of the

⁵ “Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization—Union of Macedonian Societies” (*Vutreshnata makedonska revoliutsionna organizatsiia—Suiuz na makedonskite druzhestva* or VMRO-SMD). The political party deliberately draws upon historical parallels to justify its existence, claiming status as the heir of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century revolutionary-cum-terrorist organization. Nor is it alone in doing so: there have been more than a dozen post-1991 political parties in the Republic of Macedonia using VMRO in their names, the most significant being the “IMRO-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity” (*Vnatresna makedonska revolucionerna organizatsija-Demokratska partija za makedonsko natsionalno edinstvo* or VMRO-DPMNE). Such competition over the acronym highlights its continued symbolic power.

monument to stamp on, kick and hurl away the offending wreath. They also verbally challenged and harassed the visitors despite the presence of a half-dozen police officers. “Ohrid is ours,” one VMRO-SMD supporter shouted in the uproar, “Get out, it belongs to Bulgaria!” A Bulgarian companion and resident of the town observing the event with me wryly noted, “Why is someone who lives in Blagoevgrad telling someone who lives in Ohrid to leave his home city?”⁶

Such an episode — one of dozens of similar clashes in the Blagoevgrad *oblast* since 1989 — neatly symbolizes a continuing conflict regarding the “Macedonian Question:” who are, and what are, the Macedonians? The present study examines the process by which the inhabitants of Pirin came to accept a local consciousness as synonymous with a larger Bulgarian national consciousness. This issue extended beyond questions of provincial identity. The Macedonian Question was not simply the focal point of Bulgarian foreign policy over the first half of the twentieth century, but also a critical issue in domestic politics. Conflicts over how to resolve the status of Macedonia — as either an autonomous part of the Ottoman Empire, through union with Bulgaria, or as an independent state — led to the creation of rival paramilitary organizations in the nineteenth century, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO) and the Supreme Macedonian Committee (VMK, or Vhrovisti). These rivals combined into a single organization embracing terrorist tactics even before the First World War. In a country where the Communist Party was effectively

⁶ A chance stroll meant I happened upon both the preparations for the protest and the protest itself, and thus served as an eyewitness. My thanks to Mois Moshev for confirming the statements we witnessed, and for his rather ironic commentary as the protest proceeded.

suppressed after 1923 and where Fascist parties failed to establish a mass following, VMRO came out of the war and its aftermath with a mass following. It survived as the only effective rival to state power in the interwar period. Its suppression became a common goal of the royalist dictatorship of the 1930s and the Communist one that followed after 1944. The creation of the People's Republic of Macedonia in Yugoslavia after the Second World War also revived the transnational dimensions of the Macedonian Question.

Multiple Macedonian Identities: Aegean, Vardar and Pirin Dimensions

The explosion of academic work on the former Yugoslavia during and following its dissolution — “instant history,” as it has been called⁷ —extends to Macedonia but has scarcely touched the Pirin region. Questions of “identity politics” have been addressed in a number of recent works by anthropologists that seek to understand the way that the Slavic inhabitants of Macedonia, at least those divided between Greece’s Aegean and the former Yugoslavia’s Vardar territories, constructed – or reconstructed – their national consciousness.⁸ The very dissolution of Yugoslavia has now served to recast the “Macedonian Question” — who are the Macedonians and to what state should they belong?

⁷ Gale Stokes, John Lampe, Dennison Rusinow and Julie Mostov, “Instant History: Understanding the Wars of Yugoslav Succession,” *Slavic Review* 55:1 (Spring 1996), 136-160.

⁸ Major scholarly studies are Keith Brown, *The Past in Question: Modern Macedonia and the Uncertainties of Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Danforth, *The Macedonian Conflict*; Anastasia Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat*; Hugh Poulton, *Who Are the Macedonians?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); and Victor Roudmetoff, *Collective Memory, National Identity and Ethnic Conflict: Greece, Bulgaria and the Macedonian Question* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

The historical development of Macedonian national consciousness is now perceived in light of the independence of the Republic of Macedonia since 1991.

This independence led to discussions within the Republic of Macedonia over the precise relationship between Macedonian and Bulgarian identities and renewed exchanges with Bulgaria over the relationship between the two languages.⁹ Bitter antagonism between the Greece and Macedonia in the 1990s over the very use of the word “Macedonia” has similarly served to highlight work on the historical fate of the ethnic Macedonian community in Greece.¹⁰ The Republic’s tragic brush with ethnic violence between Macedonians and Albanians in the brief civil “near-war” of the summer of 2001, and lingering tensions, resulted in renewed attention to nationalism in the republic today.¹¹

Such scholarly interest, however, has not extended to a broad examination of the central role that Pirin’s experience with VMRO played in the

⁹ For example, the discussion in the Macedonian popular press over the role of Metodi Shatorov during the Second World War. A leader of the Macedonian Communist Party, Shatorov aligned with the Bulgarian Communists rather than Tito’s Yugoslav Communist Party.

¹⁰ The Greek position from 1991 through 2006 has been that no “Macedonian nation” exists and that the new state is inhabited by Bulgarians (and Albanians). Greece on this basis has contested Macedonia’s right to use symbols such as the Star of St. Vergina on the original, 1991 Macedonian flag and to use the name “Macedonia,” insisting on the use of “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.” Both the star and the name, the argument continues, descend from the empire of Alexander the Great, which the Greeks reserve as their own heritage. On this issue see Keith Brown, “In the Realm of the Double-Headed Eagle: Parapolitics in Macedonia, 1994-9,” in Jane Cowan, ed., *Macedonia: the Politics of Identity and Difference* (London: Pluto, 2000); John Shea, *Macedonia and Greece: the Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997).

¹¹ On the conflict of 2001, see John Phillips, *Macedonia: Warlords and Rebels in the Balkans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

political history of the Macedonian Question. The Slav inhabitants¹² of geographic Macedonia, historically split between three states, divided into several groups advocating competing national consciousnesses over the course of the twentieth century. Two of these consciousnesses were ultimately adopted or co-opted by state authorities. The Republic of Macedonia,¹³ part of Yugoslavia from 1945-1991 and independent thereafter, identifies the “Macedonian Slavs” as part of a distinct Macedonian nation. The Bulgarian state has, with the exception of the six years following 1946 as detailed in Chapter Seven, supported a national consciousness that regards Macedonian Slavs as Bulgarians whose families hail from geographic Macedonia and while possessing certain unique characteristics in terms of local customs, folklore, history and dialect remain part of a larger Bulgarian nation.¹⁴ Each of these traditions stresses that it and it alone is the legitimate heir of a rich tradition of “Macedonian identity” and “Macedonian

¹² The terms “Slav inhabitants” is used throughout the manuscript to specify all those in the geographic region who possess either a Bulgarian or Macedonian identity, and to differentiate them from Greeks, Albanians and others living in the region. Although Pomaks are also Slavs, I generally treat them as a separate group given the continued significance of their confessional identity. “Slav inhabitant” is not used with any intent to stigmatize Macedonian claims to nationhood.

¹³ One of the dilemmas in the study of Macedonian history is the geographic confusion created by the conflicting usage of the term “Macedonia.” I use “Republic of Macedonia” throughout this study to refer to the modern state founded in 1944 and independent in 1991, and distinguish it from geographic Macedonia as a whole.

¹⁴ There are also Slavic Macedonians that adopted Greek or Serb identities, as well as sizeable émigré communities. Such groups lie outside the bounds of a study on Pirin. See Loren Danforth, *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), which focuses on the community in Australia.

history.”¹⁵ Each claims that the other is mistaken about its professed consciousness and that only one real and objective nation can exist for the Slavic inhabitants of Macedonia. The other is argued to be simply the product of a hundred years of “Greater Bulgarian” cultural imperialism, forced assimilation and historical falsification; or, conversely, the end result of fifty years of machinations by the Comintern, Titoist propaganda and Yugoslav brainwashing.

The inhabitants of Pirin Macedonia were confronted with multiple state-sponsored identities of who they are. It is the state’s interaction with this local consciousness that drives this study. Scholars differ, as I will explore in Chapter One, over the precise role of the state in fostering national identities in Southeastern Europe: does the state “create” nationalism, or does it “fulfill” the assertion of ethnic identity? What has been overlooked, I argue, is the relative *weakness* of the state. While the state would ultimately be successful in creating key institutions and experiences that foster identity, this required it to overcome an historical legacy of local autonomy shaped under the Ottoman Empire. The state had to assume control of nation-building. In the case of Pirin Macedonia, it did so relatively late, following previous cycles of cultural/religious organization and then a paramilitary mobilization within the district. Provincial autonomy

¹⁵ In reality, the conflict is rather more complex, since there are also Greek claims that some “Slavs” in the region are in reality “Slavophone Greeks,” and some Slavic inhabitants in present-day Greece did in fact Hellenize and adopt Greek identities. Note Evangelos Kofos, *The Macedonian Question: The Politics of Mutation* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1987), Anastasia Karakasidou *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

persisted, however, and some elements continued even through the authoritarian centralizing regimes that held power from the mid-1930s forward.

The debate over Pirin's identity is not limited to exchanges between the respective Bulgarian and Macedonian national governments and their institutions. It also exists as an internal debate within both the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria.¹⁶ VMRO-SMD, the contemporary political party noted in the opening, does not simply oppose the construction of history espoused by visitors from the Republic of Macedonia. It has repeatedly clashed (occasionally violently) with a rival Bulgarian political party local to the Pirin region, OMO-IIlinden,¹⁷ because the latter promotes a Macedonian *national* identity for the inhabitants of Pirin. The Bulgarian state has directly intervened in this conflict. OMO-IIlinden has complained of regular interference by state organs (e.g., refusal to recognize the group as a political organization, refusal to permit gatherings, police harassment). It also maintains that the Bulgarian government tacitly tolerates illegal actions undertaken by VMRO-SMD.¹⁸ The involvement of the central state authorities in a fringe provincial political movement highlights the

¹⁶ For a more in-depth discussion of the contemporary political debate, see Chapter Five, "Bulgaria's Ethnic Macedonians," of Robin Brooks's dissertation: "Ethnic Self-Identification, and Nation-Building in Post-Communism" (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of California at Berkeley, 2004). Brooks is generally sympathetic to OMO-IIlinden's arguments. There is a much smaller but extant political movement in Macedonia that similarly claims a Bulgarian identity for itself.

¹⁷ The United Macedonian Organization – IIlinden (*Obedinenata makedonska organizatsia – IIlinden*, or OMO-IIlinden). Several smaller splinter groups, such as OMO-IIlinden-PIRIN and VMRO-Independent-IIlinden also exist.

¹⁸ The complaints are noted in Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, *Human Rights in Bulgaria in 2002 – Annual Report*, (Sofia: Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2003) and Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, *Human Rights in Bulgaria in 2000 – Annual Report*. (Sofia: Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2001).

limitations of provincial autonomy, and the continued interest of the state in maintaining a monopoly over the shaping of “territorial consciousness.”¹⁹

I argue that the key dispute between these competing definitions of “Macedonians” lies in who controls the interpretation of the Pirin’s historical symbols: the heroes, events and monuments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁰ Gotse Delchev’s monument in Blagoevgrad is a contested symbolic space. It is a space, moreover, that is contested on several levels: not simply between “Macedonian” and “Bulgarian” historiographical schools, but also between “national” and “local” spheres, and “state” and “non-state” spheres. Members of the VMRO-SMD party refused to allow a foreign delegation to hold services at the Delchev *pametnik* in part because it is “theirs:” a local space that belongs to the people of Blagoevgrad. Paradoxically, though the rival party OMO-IIlinden is primarily composed of inhabitants from the province and VMRO-SMD is a national organization with the bulk of its membership residing outside the *oblast*, the former is perceived as a “foreign-inspired” organization that infringes on the symbolic space of the inhabitants of Pirin. VMRO-SMD activists have repeatedly refused to allow OMO-IIlinden to make use of certain monuments and symbols, such as the one for Gotse Delcev. Other monuments (including some

¹⁹ Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era" *American Historical Review* 105:3 (June 2000), 807-831.

²⁰ I have previously made this same argument in James Frusetta, “Divided Heroes, Common Claims: IMRO Between Macedonia and Bulgaria,” in John Lampe and Mark Mazower, eds., *Ideologies and National Identities: the Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 110-130.

dedicated to specific Macedonian themes) are seen as part of past state intrusion into local history under Communism and have been destroyed or vandalized.²¹

At the dawn of the twenty-first century no less than at the dawn of the twentieth, identity is not a simple matter in Pirin Macedonia – something symbolized by the fact that many of the aforementioned Bulgarian patriots-cum-nationalists in the September 2004 clash in Blagoevgrad refer to themselves variously as “Macedonians,” “Bulgarians from Macedonia” or “Bulgarians of Macedonian descent.”²² “Macedonian” can thus be held to be either synonymous or incompatible with “Bulgarian,” depending on one’s perspective. To be “Macedonian” has a plethora of different meanings for different people; it is an elastic term capable of multiple (and sometimes contradictory) definitions.²³ Bulgarian and Macedonian historiography each hold that the term “Macedonia” can have only a single meaning; in the context of this study, I argue that it is *both* a national *and* a regional term. “Macedonia” and “Macedonians” have been used in different ways by the state, by the inhabitants of Pirin, and by the descendants of émigrés. Each have promoted their own conception of the term.

We still need a more sophisticated understanding of the complex relationship between local communities and the state in the construction of national identities – often maintaining their own symbols and histories in sharp

²¹ The monument to Yane Sandanski, who has fallen out of favor with VMRO-SMD but is still a hero to OMO-Ilinden, has twice been pushed over and tumbled down a hill despite the fact that it weighs well over a ton.

²² In conversations with local members of VMRO-SMD, the author has heard all three terms used to describe the membership. In several cases, the same individual used two or three of the terms in self-description.

²³ Jonathan Schwartz, “Macedonia: a Country in Quotation Marks,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 11:1-2 (Fall 1993).

contrast to the “official” histories of identity. The narrative of a Vardar-based Macedonian national consciousness, rising from a nineteenth-century cultural maturation and Orthodox Slavic-language religious revival through the paramilitary struggles of the interwar period, to state sponsorship for Vardar Macedonia as a component of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia through, is now well presented in scholarly literature. The narrative of Macedonians who assimilated (sometimes forcibly) into a larger Greek identity in Aegean Macedonia is also increasingly explored.

What has not been discussed in the recent Western scholarly renaissance is the parallel historical construction of a conscious Macedonian identity within Bulgaria. This is a significant omission that has allowed work on Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia to dominate scholarly discourse. An estimated one to 1.6 million of Bulgaria’s 8 million inhabitants in the early 1990s could claim descent from at least one grandparent or great-grandparent originating from geographic Macedonia.²⁴ Macedonian folklore and cultural organization are popular among this group, and the political strength of VMRO-SMD in the 1990s was drawn directly from their ranks. The history of the Macedonian population in Bulgaria is also central to the sharp Macedonian-Bulgarian disagreements over question of identity, not just during the 1990s but since the creation of the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 1944.²⁵

²⁴Janusz Bugajski, *Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe*. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 1994), 254. VMRO-SMD’s web site puts the figure at two million.

²⁵Relations between the two states are generally good, outside of the issue of whether or not a Macedonian nation exists. This has not always been the case, particularly before 1989: the best overview is Stefan Troebst, *Die bulgarisch-*

This dearth of historical scholarship is even more striking given the importance that the “Macedonian Question” played in the past 125 years of Bulgarian history, and continues to play in contemporary Bulgarian historiography. The Macedonian émigré community of Bulgaria — the vast majority of which came to profess a Bulgarian identity — also became an influential force throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while similar Thracian and Dobrudzhan movements faded. The position of Macedonian émigrés was reinforced when one portion of geographic Macedonia, Pirin, was incorporated into Bulgaria in 1912. The group played a disproportionate role in Bulgarian politics and society given its organized political influence and the number of military officers and political leaders with origins in the region.

It played a further role, in that Bulgaria was ruled after 1912 by centralizing regimes; typical not only for Southeastern Europe, but as Charles Maier has argued typical in fact for Europe as a whole.²⁶ The administrative power of the state originated from the center, and was extended and expanded to control the entire territorial expanse of the state. Yet, significantly, Pirin proved particularly resistant to state control; local interests and organizations contested the state, and preserved levels of local autonomy not seen elsewhere in Bulgaria. While

jugoslawische Kontroverse um Makedonien, 1967-1982 (Munich: Südost-Institut, 1983). See also James Frusetta, "Divided Heroes."

²⁶ On Europe, see Charles Maier, *ibid.*; on Southeastern Europe, John Lampe, *Balkans into Southeastern Europe: A Century of War and Transition* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

the state sought to foster a central “territorial consciousness,”²⁷ rival forms of consciousness in the region continued.

Identity between State Centralization and Provincial Autonomy

Scholars have discussed the question of identity in the region: “Who are the Macedonians?” There has not been a similar discussion regarding the creation of identity: “Who determined who are the Macedonians?” The present study thus considers the “Macedonian Question” — the identity of the Slavic inhabitants of Pirin Macedonia — in light of the historical processes and choices available to the inhabitants of Pirin as part of an ongoing “negotiation” between state and province, centralization and autonomy, and between competing definitions of *Bulgarstvo* and *Makedonstvo*, “Bulgarian-ness” and “Macedonian-ness.”

Macedonian and Bulgarian scholars have addressed the question of ethnic or national identity in Pirin. However, as will be discussed in Chapter One, the dominant approaches in both historiographies remain largely cast in a perennialist or primordialist approach that assigns national consciousness and overlooks local identity. The Macedonians of Pirin, the argument goes, were recognized as Macedonian or Bulgarian because they have always been Macedonian or Bulgarian despite attempts by the rival state to de-nationalize

²⁷ Note Maier’s further online comments to the question of territoriality: Charles S. Maier, “Response II.” *History Cooperative*, September 25, 2000. July 9, 2006, <<http://www.historycooperative.org/phorum/read.php?10,29,29#msg-29>>.

them and assimilate them.²⁸ There is little question of local agency for the inhabitants of the region: ethnicity is an “inherent” quality, and “you are what you are.” This approach carries an implicit political conclusion: if an inherent identity exists, then any *other* expressed identity is automatically incorrect and a mistake at best, if not outright falsification.²⁹ A number of Western scholars, on the other hand, have argued that identity is “what you make of it,” or rather “what the state makes of it” – identity is constructed and created. I seek to steer a middle course, ascribing considerable power to the state to shape national consciousness but not according it overwhelming authority and power. In the case of Pirin, incorporation into a national identity would ultimately require the incorporation of key symbols, events and experiences that had been generated within the province: “Bulgarian-ness” required the adoption of elements of “Macedonian-ness.”

Of particular importance are the “consolidating” events or symbols shared by competing identities. Scholars like Eugen Weber have argued that the shared experience of military mobilization and training favors assimilation. This is true,

²⁸ There are views of the “ethnic descent” of Macedonians that draw directly on either descent from the ancient Macedonians or intermarriage with them by Slavs in the sixth and seventh centuries. Similarly, there are some reappraisals of the “ethnic descent” of Bulgarians from both Thracians and proto-Bulgarians (e.g., Plamen S. Tsvetkov, *Slaviani li sa bulgarite?* (Sofia: Tangra, 1998). Such views have largely receded to the fringes, although national histories in both countries generally start with these periods.

²⁹ I am indebted to Rossitsa Guencheva for conversations with her on precisely the subject of current research on identity in Macedonia, to which I return in Chapter One. While there are excellent local historians working with much more sophisticated approaches, few have worked on Macedonia. Moreover, I argue that dominant paradigm in “national history” remains in a perennialist/primordialist framework.

insofar as the state itself controls the military. The “underground army” of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO)³⁰ organized at the *local* level helped to promote assimilation, but into a sense of regional and local consciousness and a demand for local autonomy rather than national consciousness and state-building. Moreover, VMRO was politically nationalist but lay outside the emerging “alternative ideologies” of the interwar era — Fascism and Communism. The absence of either public or internal statements of political ideology is striking: VMRO existed to advocate issues of regional interest. The process of identity formation was interactive, with competing identities each influencing the construction of the other; and at different times over the period. Efforts to promote state- and nation-building and local consciousness and autonomy waxed and waned, and each would leave lasting marks on the other. Only by 1952 had the state firmly taken control over the region, but this came as the result of a six-year campaign to definitively establish local identity.

Despite the emerging strength of a neighboring identity in Vardar Macedonia and despite the absence of the kind of forceful assimilation campaign that succeeded in transforming identities in Greek Macedonia, a Macedonian

³⁰ The evolution of VMRO's acronyms can be confusing. “VMRO” is used throughout. Originally, from 1893-1902 the movement was officially “BMORO” (*Bulgarska Makedonska-odrinska Revoliutsionna Organizatsiia*, or “Bulgarian, Macedonian and Adrianople Revolutionary Organization”), and from 1902-1905 “TMORO” (*Taina Makedonska-odrinska Revoliutsionna Organizatsiia*, or “Secret Macedonian Adrianople Revolutionary Organization”). VMRO was used from 1905 on. The different names have political resonance, since BMORO and TMORO stress that the movement originally sought autonomy not simply for Macedonia, but also for Eastern Thrace; thus it is sometimes used by Bulgarian authors to stress a Bulgarian quality to the organization and its goals. I use VMRO here throughout both for consistency and because after 1905 the organization referred to itself and its past incarnations by the term.

national identity *failed* to gain ascendancy in Pirin. Why? Charles King has argued that scholars have generally focused on the “success stories” of national identity, tracing how and why successful national identities have been shaped over time—but “we know little about nationalisms that failed.”³¹ This study seeks not only to suggest why Macedonian came to be seen as synonymous with Bulgarian, but also why a “Macedonian separatist nationalism” failed to thrive within Pirin despite the official efforts by the Bulgarian Communist government promoting a Macedonian national identity during 1946-1948.

Central to the experience of Pirin was an on-going process of mutual redefinition between a local Macedonian and a national Bulgarian consciousness. Liah Greenfeld³² has argued for a “reactive” effect in which later-emerging national movements consciously used their predecessors as models for their own development. The nineteenth-century German national movement, she argues, developed in reaction to and with reference to the nationalist ethos of the French Revolution. This study draws upon such reaction in focusing on competing *forms* of consciousness. Regional identity in Pirin drew from the Bulgarian national movement, which reacted in turn to incorporate local symbols and history within a professed Bulgarian national consciousness. The result was a regional identity that remained strong enough to persist within Bulgaria throughout the first half of the twentieth century, through the experiences of state-centralization and socialism. Indeed, this identity has proven strong enough

³¹ Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 3.

³² Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

for the “Macedonian Question” to remain alive, if of considerably reduced importance, in public forums in the Republics of both Bulgaria and Macedonia today, including within the Blagoevgrad *oblast*.³³ National consciousness in the *Pirinski krai* can and should be seen as a contest between rival national movements in which the region’s local inhabitants were able to “negotiate” their identity with a state that increasingly sought to define it.³⁴

Pirin’s status as a borderland lying alongside Yugoslav (Vardar) Macedonia and Greek (Aegean) Macedonia is also important.³⁵ In Pirin a very real awareness of the “lost” Macedonian lands over the post-1912 border — a Macedonia waiting to be liberated from foreign yokes — helped strengthen and preserve a distinct identity. As a peripheral and economically backward part of the Bulgarian state, the region was subject to an ongoing process of centralization that sought to firmly integrate it. Such centralization provoked in reaction a sense of local consciousness (what Andrew Rossos has dubbed “*našism*” — “us-ism” — in the context of the Republic of Macedonia).³⁶ It also

³³ Historical columns are regular features in Bulgarian newspapers such as *Trud*, *24 Chasa*, *Struma* and the like; discussions of Macedonian history are common. The same is true of Macedonian publications such as *Nova Makedonija*, *Glas* and *Makedonsko Vreme*. Bulgarian and Macedonian television programs similarly debate the same kinds of issues. What is notable is the inclusion of such debates about history in relatively mainstream media venues.

³⁴ Sandi Michele de Oliveira, “Discourses of Identity at the Spanish/Portuguese Border: Self-Identification Strategies of Centre and Periphery,” *National Identities* 4:3 (2002), 245.

³⁵ Following the political division of Macedonia, each region is commonly defined by its dominant geographical trait: the Aegean coastline, the Pirin mountains and the Vardar river valley.

³⁶ Andrew Rossos, “Macedonianism and Macedonian Nationalism on the Left,” in Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery, eds., *National Character and National*

suggests a reappraisal of VMRO's efforts within Bulgaria. Generally, the Organization has been interpreted as a “émigré organization.” While this study acknowledges the close ties between VMRO and émigrés in Bulgaria, within Pirin itself the Organization acted as the administration of a “state within a state.” It thus attempts to reorient on VMRO’s actions within Pirin — where the bulk of its membership and power resided — rather than on its relations with émigré groups in Sofia.

This study further suggests that the construction of identity is a continuous process, and that it is accordingly better studied by providing sufficient continuity and historical context. Histories of the Pirin region have often focused on sharp *caesuras* or “breaks” in history that delineate different periods. The most frequently defined are those of 1903 (the Ilinden Uprising), of 1912-13 (the Balkan Wars and the division of geographic Macedonia) and 1944 (the rise to power of the Communist Party in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia). It may be more profitable to study continuity. While key state policies of the post-war Communist government were new (e.g., the prospect of a Balkan Federation), the paradigm of centralized rule in the region remained the same as that of the interwar governments of Aleksandar Tsankov (1924-1926) or Tsar Boris (1935-1943). I organize my chapters chronologically in order to trace the communal experiences of Pirin Macedonia from 1912 through the early 1950s, as the region sought to negotiate a local consciousness with a centralizing state.

When stated in such a fashion, the politics of national consciousness in Pirin Macedonia, and Macedonia as a whole — often considered marginal and of merely local or regional interest — are brought into dialogue with identity questions throughout Europe. The persistence of regional identities even after the codification of “national identities” is not limited to Southeastern Europe: we see them in the interaction between “provincial” and “national” identities throughout Europe. The Macedonian case was a struggle between multiple identities played out in the historical circumstances of Southeastern Europe, and a borderland between two competing identities. The role of the centralizing state places Pirin directly in the midst of the European experience of the twentieth century, it hints at the complexities of the twenty-first. The European Union’s use of regionalism in the form of the various levels of *nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques* (NUTS) in development and policy-making suggests that the question of the centralizing state versus the provinces is far from settled.³⁷

What makes Macedonia of broader interest is the historical context: the formation of national consciousness took place in a resource-poor, post-imperial and competitive environment but prior to the modernizing development stressed by “functionalist” theories of national consciousness. The formation of national consciousness drew on existing and acceptable symbols and markers that could be mobilized by both provincial and state “nation-builders” to support specific facets of identity. This study is not, ultimately, intended to establish definitively

³⁷ See John Newhouse, “Europe’s Rising Regionalism,” *Foreign Affairs* 76:1 (1997), 67-85; Charlemagne, “Europe’s rebellious regions,” *The Economist* November 13, 2003, 32.

the identity of the people of the *Pirinski krai* — something that only its inhabitants can determine, and which in the early twenty-first century is still a fluid process. It is intended as an examination of a process, to cast light both on the history of a specific province and to find the implications of this history for how we understand the formation of identity and national consciousness in general.

Structure

I address the applicability of the theories of identity formation in Chapter One. This chapter engages theories on the role of the state in nation-formation, particularly those of Anthony Smith and John Breuilly. Breuilly argues for the key use of nationalism by state elites to obtain political support. Smith also argues for the role of “experiences of state administration” in the formation of national consciousness, but adds the importance of religious organization and military organization as additional mechanisms for transforming a local identity into a self-professed national consciousness. The chapter appraises the utility of both approaches in the context of Southeastern European history in general.

Chapters Two and Three take us through the Ottoman period from the early nineteenth century through 1912, when Pirin was incorporated within Bulgaria. Chapter Two focuses on the rise of cultural and religious activity in Pirin from the early-nineteenth century beginnings of the “Bulgarian Revival” through the creation of the Bulgarian Exarchate Orthodox Church. These were nation-building “experiences” but both outside the purview of any Bulgarian state. The focus of Chapter Three, the guerilla violence that raged from 1893-1912 in

Macedonia, also remained outside of state control. Despite attempts by both the Bulgarian government and sympathetic organizations within Bulgaria, the Macedonian revolutionary organizations across the pre-1912 border were generally autonomous. The existence of these autonomous groups provided a precedent for the continued existence of such groups in Pirin after the First World War.

Chapters Four through Seven address the integration of Pirin into Bulgaria. Chapter Four focuses on the experience of “common struggle” over 1912-1923 as the Bulgarian state and the inhabitants of Pirin were involved in three wars and a post-war *coup d'état*. Here, the “administrative experience” of warfare saw the Bulgarian state and army hierarchy place VMRO in an increasingly subordinate position. But this organizational change did not negate the important symbolic role of the “liberation war” for Macedonia as a *shared* experience. Chapter Five examines the period 1923-1934, when VMRO was able to hold and administrate Pirin in its own interests. In the process, Pirin became virtually a “state within a state.”

Chapters Six and Seven address the further process of “state centralization.” Chapter Six treats the broad period of 1934-1945, in which a succession of governments seek to impose central rule over Pirin. This was successful, but only in periods when the state was strong. The stresses of the Second World War and the post-war imposition of a Communist regime weakened the government sufficiently for some local autonomy to be regained. This was reversed over 1946-1952 as Chapter Seven details. We see the new

Communist regime imposing a centrally-directed “nationalization” campaign on the local population, first to accept an exclusively Macedonian national consciousness and then an exclusively Bulgarian one. The later endured with no challenge until the post-Communist revival of earlier disputes, with which this Introduction begins.

Sources

Two archives are particularly crucial to this present study of Pirin Macedonia. The first is the Central State Archive (*Tsentralen durzhaven arhiv*, hereafter TsDA) in Sofia, Bulgaria; the second is the Provincial State Archive of Blagoevgrad (*Okruzhen durzhaven arhiv Blagoevgrad*, hereafter ODAB) in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. The TsDA contains not only records of the central government, but many of the internal records of IMRO confiscated by the police in 1934; such records have been complemented by memoir literature of IMRO members, much of it published after 1989 when restrictions on publication eased in Bulgaria. The TsDA also now includes the records of the former Central Party Archive (*Tsentralen Partien Arhiv*). The ODAB contains instructions from the central authorities to the province, counties and municipality, records of local schools and administrative organs, local police reports, as well as records of local organizations such as the Veterans’ Fraternal Organization. As with the TsDA, the ODAB now includes the material from the former District and Provincial Party Archive of Blagoevgrad (*Okruzhen partien archiv Blagoevgrad*), which contains records pertaining directly to the local Communist Party.

Unfortunately, one key archive, the internal archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health, remains “closed,” requiring selectively-given permission from the ministry for its use. Moreover, it lacks public document lists (*opisi*) regarding its contents. I was unsuccessful in securing permission as a foreign researcher to use the archive. This archive contains internal police and security reports on the region; some of this material was, luckily, also located within the *Tsentralen partien arhiv* of the Communist Party, which was subsequently merged with the TsDA and thus available. It also is well represented in the work of Bulgarian scholars, and I have correspondingly paid careful attention to this resource from secondary works.

American diplomatic records from 1919-1941 and 1944-1949 have been used, although sparingly. The American Legation in Sofia provided routine updates on domestic political issues, including a series of dispatches on Macedonian organizations. In the post-war period, the legation similarly served to provide observations on political events within the country. They provide a useful series of reports by “outside observers” not aligned with one of the various political factions within Bulgaria.

Local newspapers were an indispensable source, particularly in providing (before 1936) information not derived from state authorities. I have reviewed *Svoboda ili Smurt* and *Revoluutionsen list*, political papers linked to IMRO, in the 1920-1934 period. *Pirinski glas*, *Pirinski vesti* and *Makedonsko Zname* (a Communist newspaper) all provide a glimpse into the 1930s. The Communist-led Fatherland Front established *Pirinsko Delo* in 1944 as a provincial paper for Pirin.

Although state-run and censored, it provides a week-to-week (later, day-to-day) glimpse at evolving state *and* provincial policies in the region. I have drawn on *Nova Makedonija* (from Skopje) and *Rabotnichesko Delo* (from Sofia) in the post-war period to supplement periodicals focused on the Pirin regions in an attempt to further illuminate state policies.

I have also taken full account of Bulgarian and Macedonian scholarly literature given the rich historiographical traditions in both countries in pursuing the subject. Many of the studies done on Macedonian history are methodologically excellent and written with great personal and political passion. While I do not agree with all of their conclusions, I have profited greatly from these works. I should however note how little scholars in either country have considered the role of the state in shaping national consciousness in Pirin. When considering the state at all, scholars have focused on the brief period of 1944-48, with the dominant historiographical traditions severely criticizing one aspect or another of the state's involvement as "de-nationalization." I seek to expand the chronology of this contested nation-building across the full period from 1903 to 1952.

Chapter One

Conceptualizing Bulgaria and Macedonia, Nation and State

“Pirin Macedonia came under Bulgarian occupation in 1913.”

— www.makedonija.info

“Macedonia... was part of Bulgaria for the last [fifteen] centuries.”

www.macedoniainfo.com¹

The ultimate goal of the nineteenth-century Bulgarian national movement known as the National Awakening was the establishment of an inclusive, modern nation-state: a Bulgaria for all Bulgarians. The creation of an autonomous Principality of Bulgaria in 1879,² however, did not resolve the issues raised by the Awakening: it transformed them. The definition of “Bulgarian” was based on common language, religious affiliation and specific ethnographic traditions such as folklore and costume. The new state encompassed only a fraction of this Bulgarian population so defined. What had been a predominantly cultural and religious movement now took a political course in which the form and powers of the state and the definition and expanse of the nation were contested. Despite seeking a nation-state, the national

¹ Both quotes are drawn from websites that reflect the significant “web-presence” of the Macedonian-Bulgarian debate; in both cases, the history presented well-reflects the prevalent popular national histories of the two countries. Bill Nicholov, “Pirin Macedonia,” *Macedonia for the Macedonians*, July 29, 2006, <<http://www.makedonija.info/pirin.html>>, “Macedonia is Bulgarian not Greek,” *Macedoniainfo.com*, July 29, 2006, <<http://www.macedoniainfo.com/>>

² Bulgaria became autonomous in 1879, and formally independent only in 1908. For de facto purposes, however, it was independent from the Sublime Porte after 1879.

movement had not determined what would be the precise relationship between state and nation.³ Because the new state did not encompass the entire geographic region and population the national movement had defined as Bulgarian, national consciousness took on a critical political meaning, one that produced “deep anxiety” in the early twentieth century.⁴

Nationalism studies have also been transformed over the past twenty years, but in the opposite direction. Early studies of nationalism focused on its political character and the role of the state.⁵ But with the expansion of the field in the United States and Western Europe over the past two decades, scholars began to focus on the cultural and social aspects of nationalism, on the idea of the state as a cultural artifact.⁶ While such scholarship has proved illuminating, one result has been an implicit assumption that states help “create” nations — with little attention to the actual policies that state institutions have used to accomplish the task.

Surveys of Bulgarian nationalism have noted the use of nationalism as a political concept in Bulgaria by successive Bulgarian governments, but they focus on the manipulations of political elites rather than on how state institutions

³ Curiously, for example, the original 1879 Turnovo constitution of Bulgaria does not refer to the Bulgarian nation as such. See Vasil Giozelev, ed. *Bulgarskata durzhavnost: v aktove i dokumenti* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Nauka I izkustvo," 1981), 218-226.

⁴ Milena Mahon, “The Macedonian Question in Bulgaria” *Nations and Nationalism* 4:3 (1998), 391.

⁵ See Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1944). Kohn’s interest was in explaining German nationalism, which he saw as having led to the world wars.

⁶ Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 10.

or policies have actually attempted to define the nation.⁷ But in Bulgaria itself, contemporary national histories are by contrast similar to other national histories in Southeastern Europe in treating the establishment of the modern state as the climax of centuries-old national history. In Bulgaria, this approach does not account well for the continued evolution of both the concepts of “nation” and “state” after 1879.⁸ The relationship between state and nation is assumed in both approaches and not explored in depth.

The present study is a direct examination of the ways that state institutions in Bulgaria attempted to directly influence “national consciousness” in Pirin Macedonia over the period 1912 (following the region’s incorporation into Bulgaria) through 1952 (as the Communist regime solidified the state’s policy regarding Macedonian nationality). Three recent works on Southeastern Europe have demonstrated the utility of this approach. Irina Livezeanu’s *The Cultural Politics of Greater Romania* examines the role the Romanian Ministry of Education played in attempting to use education to forge a cultural “homogeny”

⁷ Maria Todorova, for example, provides an excellent framework of Bulgarian nationalist discourse following the creation of the state; Roumen Daskalov has addressed aspects of the state in defining the nation. But these are excellent studies in “breadth” rather than in “depth.” See Maria Todorova, “The Course and Discourses of Bulgarian Nationalism in Peter F. Sugar, ed., *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: American University Press, 1995) 55-102; Roumen Daskalov. *Bulgarskoto obshtestvo, 1878-1939: Tom I: Durzhava, politika, ikonomika* (Sofia: IK "Gutenberg," 2006).

⁸ Michael Keating, *Nations Against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland* 2nd edition. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 21; see also Roumen Daskalov, “Ideas About, and Reactions to Modernization in the Balkans,” *East European Quarterly* 31:2 (1997). Macedonian histories similarly treat Macedonia as the climax of a lengthy national “liberation struggle;” see Chapter Six.

between newly-unified Romanian territories following the First World War.⁹ Keith Brown's *The Past in Question* explores the differences between state and local memories of the past during Communism regarding the Krushevo Republic of the Ilinden Uprising.¹⁰ Charles King's *The Moldovans* looks at a third case, where Soviet policies met with limited success in defining a Moldovan nation as separate and distinct from a Romanian nation.¹¹ In each case, state institutions "intervened" in an attempt to encourage specific forms of national consciousness for political goals. Livezeanu describes this as "Gershenkronian nationalism," a political parallel to Alexander Gershenkron's theories that governments in later-industrializing countries intervened to promote economic development. In Livezeanu's term, Southeastern European states sought to hasten the rapid development of a strong (and acceptable) national consciousness among their citizenry.¹²

At the same time, this study also examines how national consciousness became tied to the territorial borders and administrative frameworks inherent to the modern state.¹³ If the promotion of a homogenous territorial consciousness could serve the interests of centralizing state institutions, the promotion of a *local*

⁹ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation-Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Keith Brown, *The Past in Question: Modern Macedonia and the Uncertainties of Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2003).

¹¹ Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000).

¹² Livezeanu, 3. Hans Kohn earlier commented on an East European acceptance of nationalism before structural transformation: Kohn, 457.

¹³ See Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* 105:3 (June 2000), 807-831.

consciousness could equally well serve the interests of provincial institutions which often preferred an established tradition of autonomy to a centrally-controlled nation-state. The choice of Pirin Macedonia accordingly serves as an apt focus of study. The province was unified with Bulgaria later than other provinces, had strong connections to bordering regions in other states (Greece and Yugoslavia), and saw continuing attempts within the province (including by force of arms) to maintain a tradition of local autonomy versus a centralizing state. Ultimately, as in Livezeanu's and Brown's studies, the institutions of a centralized state came to play a predominant role. But these institutions drew extensively on events, themes and other "markers" of national consciousness that had been developed at the provincial level, in part because the state was weak in relation to local forces for much of the period in consideration. What emerges is a history in which "local" and "national" definitions of identity conflicted and converged. National consciousness was not simply "imposed" on Pirin; it was "negotiated."

Theorizing nation and nationalism

Nationalism studies have been driven by a desire to explain the perceived role and strength of nationalism in modern European history. Of particular importance are the relationship between nationalism and the causes of the First and Second World Wars, more recently with reference to the causes of conflicts

in the 1990s and contemporary separatist political movements.¹⁴ Such studies expanded to encompass related themes of national consciousness and nation-building. The result has been the establishment of two broad scholarly approaches to explain the spread and predominance of nationalism.

“Nationalist” historians themselves have continued to stress a “primordial” or “perennial” quality of the nation — nations are natural and have objective qualities that allow them to be distinguished from each other. Nations can accordingly be traced back far into the past, by tracing these objective qualities through history.¹⁵ “Classical modernism,” the dominant approach over the past twenty years, stresses the modernity of the nation. Nations and nationalism are of relatively recent origin — or at least new in terms of the primacy of national consciousness compared to other forms of identity — and are related to broader forces of modernization that swept through Europe. They are constructed, rather than inherent.¹⁶ Ernest Gellner, for example, argues that the structural changes

¹⁴ Thanasis D. Sfikas, “National Movements and Nation-Building in the Balkans, 1804-1922: Historic Origins, Contemporary Misunderstandings” in Thanasis D. Sfikas and Christopher Williams, eds., *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 1999), 19. See also Paschalis Kitromilides, “‘Imagined Communities’ and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans,” in Paschalis Kitromilides, *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy: Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of South-Eastern Europe* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1994), 150; Gale Stokes, John Lampe, Dennison Rusinow and Julie Mostov, “Instant History: Understanding the Wars of Yugoslav Succession,” *Slavic Review* 55:1 (Spring 1996), 136-160.

¹⁵ For a perennialist example, John Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). Armstrong argues that the history of religious institutions, royal dynasties and the existence of historic states, among others, are links demonstrating a perennial character to the nation.

¹⁶ Generally, these approaches select specific elements of modernization. For broader treatments, see Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of*

created by the Industrial Revolution and concurrent urbanization transformed the state into a centralized bureaucracy, both creating the conditions for nationalism and leading states to increasingly foster national identities (e.g., through universal education).¹⁷ Benedict Anderson stresses the role of print media and mass literacy in helping large social groups “imagine” national identities they could never completely experience.¹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm argues that it was the development of class consciousness in the modern era that made space for mass politics and led ruling elites to use nationalism as a means for capturing mass support.¹⁹ Although these theorists differ on which of the ‘structural developments’ was crucial, they agree on the modern origin of nations.

Despite the scholarly attention paid to the subject, there remains little consensus on how to define “the nation.” The term “nation” is not a constant, often conflated with “ethnicity” and also often conflated with the “state” itself. Some scholars even question whether or not an acceptable definition can be agreed upon, since there are no common variables between all of the various

Modernity (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); Roumen Daskalov, “Ideas About, and Reactions to Modernization in the Balkans,” *Eastern European Quarterly* 31:2 (June 1997).

¹⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). For the rise of literacy and cultural transformation see also Gellner, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Along this line, see also Paul Brass, “Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity among the Muslims of South Asia,” in D. Tayler and M. Yapp (eds), *Political Identity in South Asia*, London: Curzon Press, 1979, 40-41; Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991).

groups ascribed as being nations.²⁰ Given the ambiguity of the terms, however, it is useful to provide from the outset a set of coherent internal definitions as used in this study:

- *Nation* — a group consciousness that attributes a common administrative or legal consciousness to its participants, in addition to defining characteristics of ancestry, culture and tradition;
- *Ethnie*²¹ — a term proposed by Anthony Smith for self-professed group consciousness based on principles of common kinship, culture, location and tradition among its participants;
- *National movement* — a group (not necessarily political) endorsing or attempting the codification of culture, tradition, language or other aspects of the *ethnie* and that calls for the *ethnie*'s consolidation into a nation;
- *Nationalism* — a political philosophy which holds that the state should be synonymous with the nation.

The differentiation Smith draws between *ethnie* and nation is not inconsequential. Scholars face the difficulty of determining the relationship between the nineteenth century rise of national movements and the antecedents that nationalists claim “proves” the existence of the nation through history. The problem becomes one of attempting to distinguish between various “myths” — symbols, activities or identities with symbolic meaning for the nation. Some classical modernist scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm argue that such myths are modern re-fabrications.²² The fact that nationalists manipulate these myths does not however mean that some connection to the past does not exist.²³

²⁰ Hobsbawm, 5, 8.

²¹ The term is derived from Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (New York: Blackwell, 1986), 153-173.

²² See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

²³ Robin Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy c. 1765-1918. Enlightenment to Eclipse* (New York: Macmillan, 2000), 109-110.

What is crucial is the degree to which those groups with which they are identified recognize these symbols as legitimate. Group elites, the state or outsiders can limit options and can prohibit the external recognition or celebration of a national consciousness. It is far more difficult to for such elites to impose self-recognition.²⁴ Smith's theories accordingly stress the continuities between existing *ethnie* and the national movements and nations that emerged in the modern era. This approach, as discussed below, is adopted here to show how late-emerging national movements in Southeastern Europe consciously drew on existing *ethnie* to build new nations. This approach is particularly significant for Pirin, where rival national movements sought to use a common set of national symbols.²⁵

Theorizing the Role of the State: Western Approaches

Initially, scholarly approaches on the state's relationship to nationalism were comparative in nature, contrasting Western and Central Europe. In Hans Kohn's work, state and nation were linked: he argued that Western European states are defined by a "civil" nationalism comprised of voluntary association. Central and Eastern Europe states, in contrast, are defined by "ethnic" nationalism that stressed an "organic" character of association.²⁶ Rogers

²⁴ Morin, 21.

²⁵ On this, see James Frusetta, "Divided Heroes, Common Claims: IMRO Between Macedonia and Bulgaria," in John Lampe and Mark Mazower, eds., *Ideologies and National Identities: the Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003).

²⁶ Hans Kohn's work draws this distinction clearly. See also Taras Kuzio, "The Myth of the Civic State: A Critical Survey of Hans Kohn's Framework for Understanding Nationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25:1 (2002), 20-39.

Brubaker has continued in this tradition, arguing that civic nationalism (as typified in France, and by extension Western Europe) is based on a form of national consciousness that stresses citizenship and mutually-held values; this is contrasted with ethnic nationalism (as typified by Germany, and by extension Central and Eastern Europe) in which ethnic origin and common descent are the unifying forces, the “nation by blood.”²⁷

Both those theories stressing that national consciousness is inherent, and those stressing it is constructed, provide some role for the state, but generally in passing. Nation-building states and nation-building elites take an active interest and a direct role in the creation, promotion or destruction of the “symbols” that represent national consciousness: language, historical events, heroes, ethnographic characteristics, etc.²⁸ In Pirin, for example, “literary Bulgarian,” based on eastern Bulgarian dialects, was taught in schools and used in the literature of the National Awakening. It thus supplanted the local Western Bulgarian dialect. Local costume was placed by ethnographers within a larger Bulgarian whole while being replaced simultaneously with modern dress. Local folklore was similarly integrated and replaced with a Bulgarian “literary canon.” A concept of a “Bulgarian national culture” was thus defined, and local variations in

²⁷ Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

²⁸ The ascribed values are, in fact, symbolic of relationships between social groups, of identity, of political values, and thus are a key battleground. Note Keith Brown, “In the Realm of the Double-Headed Eagle: Parapolitics in Macedonia, 1994-1999,” in Jane K. Cowan, *Macedonia: The Politics of Identity and Difference* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2000), 122-139. More generally, see Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1991).

Pirin were either assimilated, trivialized or eliminated. Minority populations in the region (such as Greeks, Turks and Pomaks — Slavic-speaking Muslims) and local identities (particularly those of town and village) were assimilated into the new national *corpus*.²⁹ But structural theories have *assumed* the state's direct role over a gradual process, rather than directly examining it.

John Breuilly's theoretical approach in nationalism studies focuses specifically on the state. In his work, nationalism is a "form of politics" created by the nineteenth century modernization of *states* (rather than of society).³⁰ Emerging state bureaucracies deliberately used emerging national consciousness for their own purposes — fostering a common and mutual identification among the population at large with the state and political elites, concurrently encouraging greater loyalty to the state, allowing for the creation of mass conscript armies, easing the acceptance of taxation, and in general enhancing the ability of the state to mobilize and direct its citizens.³¹ Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* and Peter Sahlins' *Boundaries* are among the few works to explore these themes directly, the former in chapters addressing the active role of the French government in shaping a "French

²⁹ Or excluded from it; the local Greek population, particularly predominant in the town of Melnik, was deported to Greece during the Greco-Bulgarian Population Exchange of 1923. Local Turks, too, have largely been ignored in the construction of a Bulgarian identity in the region.

³⁰ John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 9.

³¹ See also Charles Tilly, "States and Nationalism in Europe 1492-1992," *Theory and Society* 23:1 (February 1994), 131-146; idem, "Reflections on the History of European State-making" in Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

national consciousness” among the rural peasantry, the latter in examining the effect of a mutual Franco-Spanish border running through the Pyrenees.³²

In both cases, however, while the active role of the state is emphasized, the actual *policies* of the state are not. The importance of a more careful examination of the state has been emphasized by the recent work of Charles King on Moldova regarding *failed* Soviet efforts in the 1920s through 1930s and again in the 1940s to transform a local provincial consciousness into a national consciousness. This suggests that the role of state institutions to build nations, was circumscribed. “If in fact nations really are invented things,” Charles King argues, “then can members of any human group be made to embrace any ethnic or national identity...?”³³ The answer is clearly no, that state policies intended to encourage national consciousness must be seen as “legitimate” by the group they target.³⁴ The most successful state policies are those building upon existing characteristics of an *ethnie*.

Theorizing Nation and State: Indigenous Approaches

Scholars question whether the “classical modernist” approach can be applied objectively outside of Western Europe. Partha Chatterjee argues that the classical modernist approach, among others, defines nationalism narrowly and

³² Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979).

³³ King, 2.

³⁴ Patrick Hossay, *Contentions of Nationhood: Nationalistic Movements, Political Conflict, and Social Change in Flanders, Scotland, and French Canada* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2002), 1.

privileges the Western European experience.³⁵ Theoretical approaches thus shape a “general” theory of nationalism from a small set of cases, and the historical experience of individual cases is largely overlooked or ignored.³⁶ The civic/ethnic nationalism divide as defined by Kohn and Brubaker has received particular criticism as pejorative. Maria Todorova suggests that terms such as “nationalist” too easily become political labels used to foster unequal power relationships and privilege a West that credits itself as resting on a sense of civic identity, rather than national identity.³⁷

Within Bulgaria and Macedonia, Western theories emphasizing cultural approaches to the study of nationalism have been engaged but unevenly.³⁸ Historiography *per se* since 1989 has focused primarily on “objective” qualities of nationhood. Ivan Elenkov is an exception in broadly examining the question of

³⁵ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 216.

³⁶ Sfikas, “National Movements and Nation-Building,” 19.

³⁷ Maria Todorova, “The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention,” 455.

³⁸ Recent work has chiefly served to introduce fundamental theoretical concepts. In works on contemporary politics, Orlin Zagorov mentions nationalism theory briefly while Dimitur Popov examines national identity with regards to a “declining national spirit” in Bulgaria; see Orlin Zagorov, *Bulgarskata natsionalna ideia* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Znanie,” 1994); Dimitur Popov, *Bulgarskiat natsionalizum* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Vulkan 4,” 2000). Classical modernism theory has been engaged directly in several recent texts. Tomislav Diakov employs discourse analysis in analyzing the “Bulgarian national character.” Nikolai Aretov examines the relationship between nationalism and national myths in examining Bulgarian national literature. Malina Stefanova takes a philosophical approach towards national consciousness, including specific discussion on the concept of the “national state.” See Tomislav Diakov, *Bulgarskiyat harakter* (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov,” 2001); Nikolai Aretov, *Natsionalna mitologija i natsionalna literatura* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Kralitsa Mab,” 2006), 8-26; Malina Stefanova, *Natsionalna identichnost: Semiotichen rakurs kum problema za samorazbiraneto* (Sofia: Izdatelsko Amelie, 2000), 88-105. Historians have not used nationalism theory to address historical experience of national consciousness in either Bulgaria or in Macedonia.

nationalism in terms of Bulgarian cultural history in the interwar period.³⁹ With regards to Macedonia, the burgeoning national literature in both countries debates whether or not a specific national consciousness exists (e.g., are the inhabitants of Macedonia part of a Bulgarian or a Macedonian nation?) rather than any theoretical approach about how nations came to be. Even the very term Macedonia is a source of conflict since its definition shifts in different circumstances. The Bulgarian government in 1991 quickly gave official recognition to a Macedonian state, but not to a Macedonian language or history.⁴⁰ This is due in part to contemporary political pressures that influence the production of history.⁴¹ But it is also shaped by the dominant concept of the nation, and of national history.

The thrust of national histories in post-1989 Bulgaria and Macedonia contains an implicit rejection of the other country's codified national history.⁴²

³⁹ Ivan Elenkov, *Rodno i diasno*, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "LIK," 1998).

⁴⁰ The term has very different connotations in the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria (and quite different besides in Greece). "Who controls the word Macedonia" is at the heart of the issue. Loren Danforth, *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 6.

⁴¹ See Stefan Troebst, "IMRO + 100 = FRYOM? The politics of Macedonian historiography" in James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) for a survey of the major claims. Politics influence the production of history in all countries, however, and should not be regarded as somehow a peculiarly "Balkan" trait: the Enola Gay controversy in 1993-1995 at the U.S. Smithsonian Air and Space Museum shows that American historiography can be equally political.

⁴² See *Kritika i Humanizum* for a dissenting view that rejects the concept of Bulgarian nationalist history. However, the book the article responds to — *Deset makedonski luzhi* ("Ten Macedonian Lies") by Bozhidar Dimitrov — was far more widely read than the issue of *Kritika i Humanizum*, underscoring the staying power of nationalist history. The Macedonian position is well-presented in Ivan Katarjiev, *Istorija na makedonskiot narod: Makedonija meѓу Balkanski te*

National histories in both countries stress a primordialist approach that sees nations as unique, “*sui generis* formations.”⁴³ The basis of national consciousness in both historiographic traditions thus lies in the form of ethnographic markers argued to provide “objective” measurements by which national identities can be defined — traits such as language, cultural practices, kinship networks, historical events, the deeds of national heroes, evidence of historical self-consciousness (such as the use of the terms “Macedonian” or “Bulgarian”), folklore and even physiology. If nations can be defined by “objective” markers, it demonstrates a real and natural quality of such nations, demonstrable proof of that nation’s existence. The historical existence of such ethnographic markers is presented in order to show the continuity of the nation’s existence. More generally, Southeastern European historiography traces modern national consciousness back to the medieval or ancient periods.⁴⁴

Given the long period of rule by the Ottoman Empire, this process of tracing “perennial” characteristics tends to link modern national states with respective medieval empires, sometimes even to the ancient world; but these

Vtorata svetska vojna (1912-1941) (Skopje: Institute za natsionalna istorija, 2000).

⁴³ Umut Özkirimli *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 19.

⁴⁴ Or several different periods at the same time; Romanian historiography stresses the links to the ancient Dacians, to the Roman period (note, for example, the use of Roman place names, e.g. Cluj-Napoca) and to medieval figures such as Vlad Tepes or Mihail the Brave. See Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: Central European Press, 2001).

are seen as forming a single unbroken national consciousness over time.⁴⁵ The nation may have slumbered at times during Ottoman rule, but it would be awakened through the appropriate national re-awakening; the nation always existed, even in periods when it could not manifest itself as openly or as strongly due to foreign occupation. Historiographical traditions in Bulgaria and Macedonia correspondingly trace their national existence back to the fourteenth century.⁴⁶

The historical events from 1878 to 1952 detailed in the succeeding chapters are claimed by both Bulgarian and Macedonian national historical traditions. But “nationalists” on both sides concur they can only belong to one of the two histories, and only a *single* “historical truth” can exist. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, the historiographical traditions became mutually and finally exclusive over 1946-1952. Any affirmation of national consciousness for one meant, as noted in the Introduction, that the other’s history is simply wrong at best, an outright lie at worst.⁴⁷ Disputes over historiography still take on a bitter

⁴⁵ Roumen Daskalov, *Building up a National Identity: The Case of Bulgaria*, working paper SPS no. 94/11 (Florence, Italy: European University Institute, Department of Political and Social Sciences), 4.

⁴⁶ For Bulgaria, see Vera Mutafchieva, “The Notion of the Other: The Turk, the Jew and the Gypsy,” in Antonina Zhelyazkova, ed., *Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility Between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria* (Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations Foundation, 1995), 22; for Macedonia, see Hristo Andonov-Poljanski, ed., *Documents of the Macedonian People for Independence and a Nation-State, Volume 1* (Skopje: Kultura, Makedonska Kniga, Medunarodna Politika & Misla, 1985), *passim*.

⁴⁷ It is important to note that there are a number of historians (and, I would argue, “ordinary” citizens of both states) willing to recognize the existence of the other – e.g., Bulgarians recognizing a modern Macedonian nation, Macedonians willing to recognize that there are “Macedonian Bulgarians” who feel part of a Bulgarian nation. But even here, there is conflict: unless one believes *both* nations to be relatively recent constructs (which we do see in some cases, such as Iliev, *ibid*), there remains a *historical* debate. Thus the opinion one may hear

tone because it is mutually perceived that the other side is attempting to weaken, even destroy contemporary national consciousness and independence. Scholarly periodicals such as *Makedonski Pregled*, *Glasnik* or *Macedonian Review* commonly use terms like “falsification,” “theft” and “lies;” The popular press as represented in mainstream periodicals and publishing houses is even more vituperative. One of the more popular recent Bulgarian titles on Macedonian history translates into English as *Ten Macedonian Lies*.⁴⁸

The importance of the state in these historical traditions is thus limited to “realizing” the existence of the nation. Bulgarian claims to a 1300-year Bulgarian state tradition or Macedonian claims to a statehood dating back to either the Macedonia of Philip and Alexander or (at least) to Samuil’s medieval empire are, *a priori*, arguments that these states *represented* the nation. Several scholars from Bulgaria and Macedonia have recently taken more nuanced views regarding the relationship between the nation and state,⁴⁹ but the process of “tracing back” the history of the nation well before than the modern period remains academic orthodoxy in the national history of both countries. In the predominant indigenous academic tradition, the state’s involvement might

in some circles in Bulgaria, “The Macedonians are a nation *now*, but they weren’t fifty years ago, they were Bulgarians then.”

⁴⁸ Bozhidar Dimitrov, *Deset luzhi na makedonizma* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “ANIKO,” 2000). Although the work is not scholarly in nature – indeed, it seems deliberately inflammatory – Dimitrov himself is the head of the National Museum of History.

⁴⁹ For a sociological approach, see Ilia Iliev, “On the History of Inventing Bulgarian History” (Vienna: IWM Working Paper 5/2000); also Roumen Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans: Historiography of the Bulgarian Revival* (New York: CEU Press, 2004). I thank Rossitsa Guencheva for informative discussions on this issue.

realize or falsify but not create or shape; the state's influence is limited to the negative.

The State, Modernization and Nationalism in Southeastern Europe

Theories of classical modernism argue that structural changes created conditions for cultural and political movements that allowed the development of national consciousness. In Southeastern Europe, however, such structural changes were slower to develop. National movements rose *earlier* than the structural changes (such as industrialization or urbanization) that Ernest Gellner, as already noted, posits as the key structural factors that led to the rise of national consciousness. In the case of Bulgaria, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, the “national movement” was a cultural and religious movement – which sought to bring about structural change and viewed national consciousness as a modernizing factor. The national movement sought to realize both the state and the nation.⁵⁰

Nineteenth-century Southeastern European national movements generally saw the nation-state as a *route* to modernization.⁵¹ Such modernization was not necessarily identical to that framed in classical modernist theory. Southeastern European states focused on “end-products” such as standing armies, civil bureaucracies, Western-style universities and educational systems, modern capitals, modern industry and (nominally) egalitarian and

⁵⁰ E.g., as expressed in Peter F. Sugar, “External and Domestic Roots of Eastern European Nationalism,” in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Peter Sugar and Ivo Ledener, 2nd ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

⁵¹ Daskalov, “Modernization in the Balkans,” *passim*.

representative democratic constitutions. As John Allcock has argued in the case of Yugoslavia, the result was the central state's rapid achievement of certain aspects of "modernity" but with slow progress in other areas.⁵² This range of areas, he argues, suggests the need for a broader definition of modernization. This study accordingly follows Jurgen Habermas' formulation from *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*:

The concept of modernization refers to a bundle of processes that are cumulative and mutually reinforcing: to the formation of capital and the mobilization of resources. To the development of the forces of production and the increase in the productivity of labor; to the establishment of centralized political power and the formation of national identities. To the proliferation of rights of political participation, of urban forms of life, and of formal schooling. To the secularization of values and norms.⁵³

This formulation of modernization explicates the fact that, in the Balkan context, nationalism was seen as part of an ongoing process of modernization that would eventually lead to economic development and other material progress.⁵⁴

State-formation was part of this process. The new independent Balkan states created, in Charles Maier's term, a "territorial consciousness," borders within which the state's authority was to be paramount and stood for the

⁵² See John Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000) for an excellent study on the role of modernization in the Yugoslav context.

⁵³ See Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

⁵⁴ Daskalov, "Modernization in the Balkans," 141-142. Liah Greenfeld, *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) make the argument that nationalism promotes economic growth.

“national consciousness” of its inhabitants.⁵⁵ This contrasted starkly with the existing experience within the Ottoman Empire, in which the borders of “political space” were not assumed to coincide inherently with ethnic or religious borders; the Empire was multiethnic and multi-religious. It also contrasted with the Ottoman Empire’s willingness to allow significant local autonomy, more than the new independent states were willing to tolerate.

The Provincial Experience: From Ottoman Autonomy to Centralization

The most significant difference between the formation of national consciousness in the Balkans and in Western Europe was the legacy of Ottoman rule. England and France each enjoyed hundreds of years of existence and continuity of rule in the early modern era, allowing for a gradual development of a territorial consciousness, relatively strong central government and (ultimately) national consciousness.⁵⁶ The length and consistency of this state apparatus became a basis for the creation of national identities in these countries, the state itself a symbol of the emerging nation. The strong central state based on territorial and national consciousness that Charles Maier describes had an established history and continuity. For the countries of Southeastern Europe, however, the early modern period and (in some cases)

⁵⁵ Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era" *American Historical Review* 105:3 (June 2000); see also Calhoun, 66-85.

⁵⁶ Note Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990 – 1992* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993). The history of Irish, Basque or Breton nationalism, on the other hand, is more comparable to that of Southeastern Europe.

much of the nineteenth century was marked by Ottoman rule. This shaped both national movements and local particularisms. While British or French national movements sought to transform existing kingdoms into nation-states, Balkan national movements sought to rebel against existing Imperial authority and to differentiate each other *vis-à-vis* rival national movements.

Ottoman rule was further important in a myth-building fashion for national consciousness, providing a ready “other.” Nation-builders in Southeastern Europe emphasized claimed historical experiences of the *tursko igo* (“Turkish Yoke”), forced conversion to Islam or the *devshirme* child-tax and the use of retaliatory massacres after Christian uprisings) in order to suggest that Ottoman rule was universally harsh and alien. Whatever the actual truth to such claims, they were effective in rallying mass support for later national movements. In truth, the ruling Ottoman apparatus was alien in language and culture.⁵⁷ Perhaps fundamentally, it was alien in religion as well.⁵⁸ The Ottomans provided a Other against whom an “Us” could be defined: the national identities which coalesced in the nineteenth century drew from those who could be defined as *not* Muslim,

⁵⁷ This allowed Ottoman rule to be defined as “Asiatic,” “non-European.” See Milica Bakic-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of the Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review* 54:4 (Winter 1995). Such terms suggest that Ottoman rule was alien and “Other” to the region. In fact, non-Turkish and non-Muslim groups were sometimes over-represented in the administration of the Empire, as the emergence of the Phanariot Greeks into positions of power during the eighteenth century attests.

⁵⁸ Adrian Hastings has argued for a perennialist view that religion was of central importance in *all* national identities. While agreeing that religious and dynastic identities (certainly prevalent in the medieval and early modern periods) could be drawn upon as symbols by *later* national identities, a strict continuity of identity is too problematic. See Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4, 137-138.

as *raya* (subjects), who generally (with the exception of the Romanians) lacked a native aristocracy and who were “second-class” inhabitants of the Empire and in certain cases could point to a history of suffering and injustice at the hands of the Ottomans.⁵⁹ This is, indeed, rather more similar to how post-colonial nationalisms reacted against the ruling, colonial power than it is to the emergence of modern French or English national identities.

Yet while its “alien” ruling class allowed for an easy dichotomy of “us” and “other,” at the same time the Ottoman Empire allowed broad powers of autonomy for local regions and populations. Crucial was the system of *millet*s, conferring certain group rights on various religious denominations in the empire. The Orthodox Christian population of the Balkans was placed within the *rum millet*,⁶⁰ other *millet*s would be created for Jews, Armenian Orthodox and Coptic Christians. This suited the Ottoman conquerors, who placed the Orthodox Church in authority over the Christian population and who could then hold the Patriarch of the Church responsible for the behavior of the Empire’s Christian

⁵⁹ In retrospective accounts, another significant “other” would become “the Turks,” in other words Turks as an ethnic category. Such a view is anachronistic, in that the Ottoman Empire was not specifically a *Turkish* empire; Southeastern European nationalist literature tends to lump Albanians, Kurds, Circassians and indigenous Muslims together with Turks, since by the late nineteenth century the nexus for identity in the region was increasingly ethnic/national rather than confessional, as it had been under the empire. The linkage is so strong, in fact, that in the 1990s “Turk” became a common pejorative term in the former Yugoslavia for Bosnian Muslims. Such definitions of “Ottomans” or “the Turk” ignored or obscured legacies of peaceful coexistence and represent political agendas more than historical reality.

⁶⁰ E.g., the “Rouman” *millet*, since the conquered Byzantines in fact referred to themselves as “Romans.” The term was extended, however, to refer to all the peoples of the region of the Orthodox rite conquered and included within the Ottoman Empire. Other Christian rites received their own *millet*s over time.

subjects. It also suited the forms of Islamic law practiced within the Empire, which tolerated Christian (and Jewish) worship but provided for discriminatory taxation and limited certain rights (church construction, military service, etc.). Orthodox Christians, in turn, enjoyed continued use of their own laws and customs, at least within any intra-Christian social context.

The decline of the central power held by the *Sublime Porte* from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century meant territorial autonomy for many provinces as well. While often this meant autonomy for local Ottoman *pashas*, it also allowed for the rise of distinct national movements for and among Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs.⁶¹ Ethnographers in the region also noted various groups such as the Vlachs (migratory pastoralists) and Torbeshi and Pomachs (Muslims who were ethnically and linguistically Slavic). These were alternately endorsed as their own ethnic groups or were “claimed” by ethnographers for their own nation.⁶²

Respective national movements defined used “ethnic markers” to define the divisions between these perceived nations. Language in particular proved central to the nineteenth century romantic concept of the nation prevalent in Southeastern Europe. But this presented certain complications. On the one hand, the Albanian, Greek, Hungarian, Romanian and Turkish languages now

⁶¹ The Romanian principalities remained under the rule of local notables as a vassal state rather than under Ottoman *pashas*.

⁶² See H.R. Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool: University Press, 1951). When the Macedonian national movement emerged is a contentious topic, as is discussed with respect to Bulgarian and Macedonian historiography in Chapters Two and Three.

presented as “national” languages were clearly distinct from each other. Of these only Romanian is close to other Indo-European languages, and Hungarian is completely apart, in the Finno-Ugric family. This allowed for easy differentiation based on language. Such distinctions did not exist within the South Slavic language family, which formed a closely related linguistic “spectrum.” Slovene dialects in the west were far removed from the eastern Bulgarian dialects, but there were no clearly-defined boundaries between one dialect to the next throughout this expanse. Even the modern Slavic literary languages (again, see Table One, next page) show great similarity. Ethnologists could easily define Slavic-speakers in Macedonia in comparison with Greek- or Turkish-speakers. But differentiating between Slavic dialects (or the emerging codified national languages) was more difficult.

In Southeastern Europe, language became the key marker of national consciousness. Proponents of national consciousness adopted the formula “language = nation = state” because it was useful in readily distinguishing differences between ethnic groups long part of a multicultural Ottoman Empire.⁶³ Stressing divisions between the languages and equating language with national consciousness allowed nation-builders to equate all speakers of that language as part of that nation, particularly in the period before a unifying state existed.⁶⁴ But within the South Slavic branch, the lack of easy dividing lines resulted in

⁶³ Tomasz Kamusella, “Language as an Instrument of Nationalism in Central Europe,” *Nations and Nationalism* 7:2 (2001), 239.

⁶⁴ Kamusella, 244.

contested zones between emerging national awakening, as will be discussed in Chapter Two.

	I	you, plural	"to be," singular	"I am reading."	"I will read the book."	"I read the book" (past tense)
South Slavic languages (east to west)						
Bulgarian	аз az	вас vas	съм sum	Аз чета. <i>Az cheta</i>	Аз ще прочета книгата. <i>Az shte procheta knigata</i>	Аз четох книгата. <i>Az chetoh knigata</i>
Macedonian	јас jas	вас vas	сум sum	Јас четам. <i>Jas chetam</i>	Јас ќе ја прочетам книгата. <i>Jas kje ja prochetam knigata</i>	Јас ја четав книгата. <i>Jas ja chetav knigata</i>
Štokavian (SC)*	ја ja	ви vi	бити biti	Ја читам. <i>Ja čitam.</i>	Ја ћу прочитати књигу. <i>Ja ču pročitat knjigu</i>	Ја сам прочитao књигу. <i>Ja sam pročitao knjigu</i>
Kajkavian (SC)*	ја ja	ви vi	biti	Ја читам. <i>Ja čitam.</i>	Ја бум прочital knjigu. <i>Ja bum pročital knjigu.</i>	Pročital sam knjigu.
Slovene	јаз jaz	ви vi	obstajam	Јаз берем. <i>Jaz berem.</i>	Брал bom knjigo. <i>Bral sem knigo.</i>	Брал sem knigo.
Non-Slavic Southeastern European languages						
Albanian	унë unë	ju	унë jam	Unë lexoj. <i>Ego diavazo.</i>	Unë do ta lexoj librin. <i>Ego diavaso to vivlio.</i>	Unë lexova librin.
Greek	εγώ ego	εσύ esi	είμαι eimai	Εγώ διαβάζω. <i>Ego diavazo.</i>	Εγώ διάβασα το βιβλίο. <i>Ego tha to diavaso to vivlio.</i>	ψωρεύω θα το διαβάσω το βιβλίο.
Romanian	eu	voi	eu sunt	Eu citesc	Eu am citit carteia.	Eu am citi carteia.
Turkish	ben	seni	im	Ben okuyorum.	Kitabı okuyacağım.	Kitabı okuyorum.

* Štokavian and Kajkavian are two major dialects of Serbo-Croatian.

The inhabitants of Ottoman Southeastern Europe found established group identities challenged in the nineteenth century by the rapid emergence of independent Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania.⁶⁶ These four nation-states (five, counting Montenegro) actively sought to promulgate national consciousness both at home in among what they perceived as co-nationals

⁶⁵ This chart is illustrative rather than definitive as it reflects the contemporary "literary" languages. Codification intentionally purged literary languages of foreign influence, distancing each language from its neighbors. On the importance of language and nationalism in the region see Victor Friedman, "Observing the Observers: Language, Ethnicity, and Power in the 1994 Macedonian Census and Beyond," in Barnet Rubin, ed., *Toward Comprehensive Peace in Southeastern Europe: Conflict Prevention in the South Balkans* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996), and Keith Hitchins, *Orthodoxy and Nationality: Andrei Saguna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1846-1873* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). My thanks to Ana Antić, Rumena Buzharovska, Dita Bytyqi, Anca Glont, Yıldız Sadakova and Bojan Zivanić for their assistance with this table.

⁶⁶ The Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldova were technically vassal states of the Sultan before 1878.

remaining under Ottoman rule. The states also appeared quickly, over a period of roughly one-hundred years, with Bulgaria the last to gain *de facto* independence in 1878 and progress to full and *de jure* independence in 1908. Unlike the gradual experience of state-building in Great Britain and France, the new government imported a model of strong central ministries and a strong cabinet with direct rule over the provinces. This was a stronger state than specified in the original 1878 Turnovo Constitution of Bulgaria, which had reserved considerable autonomy for the provinces.⁶⁷ As is discussed in Chapter Four, the state immediately fought to establish its authority to define the “territorial consciousness” of people living within Bulgaria.

State-Building and Nation-Building

As noted earlier, national consciousness emerged in Southeastern Europe in the nineteenth century *earlier* than the structural changes that classical modernist theory posits. The role of the state in assuming control over the definition of national consciousness from the earlier cultural movement was the crucial factor. After independence, state institutions were instrumental in encouraging and shaping national consciousness. This was part of the state-making experiment itself, as the centralized state sought to expand its power by obtaining mass support and used nationalism as a vehicle for such support.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Giozelev, *ibid*, 219.

⁶⁸ For an example of the use of nationalism to obtain popular support, see Gale Stokes, *Politics as Development: The Emergence of Political Parties in Nineteenth Century Serbia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

In examining the role of the state in building and shaping national consciousness in Pirin, this study follows Anthony Smith's argument for ethno-symbolism. National consciousness built upon an existing consciousness, that of the *ethnie*. In the Southeastern Europe of the Ottoman Empire ethnic categories were established, if not predominant, and aspects of language, folklore, dress and profession (often divided along ethnic lines) resulted in clear group boundaries. Smith stresses the role of established "symbols, myths, values and memories" in the development of nationalism in transforming existing social groups into nations.⁶⁹ Smith further distinguishes three specific "mobilizing mechanisms" by which *ethnie* were transformed into national, or nation-state consciousness. In the case of Pirin, at least, these mobilizations proceeded in a rough chronological order:

- A cultural mobilization between the 1820s to 1893, in which an emerging intelligentsia (both secular and religious) arose to lead and expand the national movement;
- A military mobilization, as the local national movement grew politicized and turned to revolution through local paramilitary organizations over 1893 to 1912 and cooperation with the Bulgarian army over 1912-1923; and
- An administrative mobilization that promoted the mass inclusion of the Bulgarian inhabitants of Pirin through definitions of territory and citizenship.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ See Smith, *Ethnic Origin of Nations*.

⁷⁰ Smith, 154-173. Smith's concept mobilizing phases is similar to Miroslav Hroch's argument that national consciousness in Eastern Europe was spread by the three phases of foundation, populism and mass appeal. But Hroch does not specify how educated elites "transmit" the national ideal. See Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe," in Gopal, Balakrishnan, ed. *Mapping the Nation* (New York: Verso, 1996).

Smith's emphasis on the role of history and a historical *ethnie* as the basis of an emerging national consciousness is particularly apt. Nationalist movements in Southeastern Europe drew heavily on history and historical symbols to explain their concept of the nation;⁷¹ and they also built upon *existing* frameworks of historical symbols developed by successive phases of the national project.

Anthropological definitions of ethnicity stress its nature as an identity created by interaction *within* the group as much as *between* different groups.⁷² Both external impositions of nationhood and self-determined national consciousness draw on historical justification to guide such interaction. While this study agrees that national consciousness remains "plastic" and can be molded, it also must be acceptable to those who share this national consciousness. Specific ethnographic markers alone are not sufficient: there are currently more claimed speakers of the artificial language *klingonaase* than of Navajo (Diné), but whatever objective claim the greater number of *klingonaase* speakers confers, this has not conferred linguistic legitimacy or identity upon them. There remains a subjective element of self-definition, and outside recognition.

⁷¹ For the disputed historical symbols between Macedonia and Bulgaria, see Jane K. Cowan and Keith Brown, "Macedonian Reflections" in Jane K. Cowan, ed., *Macedonia: The Politics of Identity and Difference* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2000), 7.

⁷² For example, see Fredrick Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1969)

Macedonia was the center of “competing national consciousnesses,” a sort of “marketplace of identity”⁷³ in which multiple options were available. The present study thus traces the evolution of how a centralizing state increasingly sought to mobilize national consciousness within Pirin. Fundamentally, the state had to provide an acceptable identity that was understandable to the inhabitants of Macedonia, one that embraced symbols and markers that inhabitants found meaningful. The state faced competition from groups that favored an “autonomous” local consciousness for the region, stressing local Macedonian characteristics and by the interwar period claimed state authority for themselves. The response, over the course of time, was for the state to acknowledge local particularisms while obtaining as much control over as much of the process of nation-building as possible. At the climax of conflict between autonomic and centralized identities during the Macedonianization campaigns of the late 1940s, the Communist regime was successful in gaining control over *both* impulses.

The origins of this autonomist-centralizing struggle can be seen as early as the late nineteenth century. The legacy of Ottoman rule was that Pirin received not only substantial autonomy from state authorities in Istanbul, but was ethnically and economically “fractured,” both between localities and between the town and countryside. It was in this context that the Bulgarian National Awakening would attempt to promote a single national consciousness.

⁷³ Note Kosaku Yoshino, “Rethinking Theories of Nationalism: Japan’s Nationalism in a Marketplace Perspective,” in Kosaku Yoshino, *Consuming Ethnicity and Nationalism: Asian Experiences* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 8-28

Within Pirin, Macedonian paramilitary movements and local leaders would dispute this process, first among themselves, then with the Bulgarian state itself.

Chapter Two

Cultural Mobilization: The Nineteenth-Century National Awakening in Pirin

"....every culture must have its state, preferably its own."
— Ernest Gellner¹

Bulgarian historiography refers to the nineteenth-century Bulgarian national movement as the *Narodno Vuzrazhdane* (National Awakening). The term, in common use by the 1850s, embodies the concept that a historically extant and continuous Bulgarian national consciousness was revived or reborn in the nineteenth century after centuries of slumber under Ottoman rule.² This idea suited the outlook and writings of intellectuals (including Orthodox clergy) within the national movement, who sought to “redeem” a historic Bulgarian spirit in Pirin, as in all Bulgarian-inhabited lands of the Ottoman Empire.

Anthony Smith calls such scholarly and ecclesiastical elites a “priesthood” of national consciousness, an intelligentsia serving to promote the cause of the

¹ Ernest Gellner, “The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation: The Myths of Nation and Class,” in Gopal Balakrishnan, ed., *Mapping the Nation* (New York: Verso, 1996), 110.

² Roumen Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans: Historiography of the Bulgarian Revival* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004), 1-2, 12. Daskalov argues that the term assumed political overtones, equating the slumbering nation with a “slumbering” state. Macedonian historiography finds a separate and distinct Macedonian Revival, a point of friction with the Bulgarian position. For a Macedonian perspective, see Boro Mokrov, “The Struggle for the Macedonian Language in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Macedonian Review* 11:2 (1981); Blazhe Koneski, *Towards the National Renaissance* (Skopje: NIP “Nova Makedonija,” 1961); Michael Seraphinoff, *The Nineteenth Century Macedonian Awakening* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996).

nation among a larger ethnic laity.³ In the nineteenth century this movement called for Bulgarian-language schools and a Slavic-language rite in religious services and administration in place of the use of Greek, the better to encourage a Bulgarian consciousness. The *Vuzrazhdane* mobilized local community leaders in the defense of “Bulgarian culture” — financially supporting local schools and Orthodox churches and promoting a Bulgarian character in their activities.⁴ The ethnically Greek-dominated hierarchy of the Orthodox Church responded by mobilizing their own supporters in the region. The result was a conflict in which the unity of local Orthodox Christians shattered along ethnic lines.

If the twentieth century was the crucial period in which rival versions of the nation became a mass political phenomenon in Pirin, the nineteenth century was the period in which potential Bulgarian and Macedonian consciousnesses were initially defined and debated. This chapter accordingly traces the historical background of the “cultural” movement in the nineteenth century, while Chapter Three outlines the historical development of the revolutionary, paramilitary organizations that emerged in the 1890s from the earlier cultural movement.

Late Ottoman Macedonia

The Ottoman government, the Sublime Porte (so named for the courtyard in the Topkapı Palace where the Sultan and Grand Vizier held administrative court sessions) restructured provincial governance in Macedonia as part of the

³ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986), 157-161.

⁴ This fits Hroch’s model of national movements; see Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe,” in Balakrishnan, *ibid.*

broad course of reforms that began in 1826 during the reign of Mahmud II through the Tanzimat period of 1839 to 1876 and the period of constitutional reform from 1876 to 1878.⁵ In 1858 the Porte expanded the power of the *valis* (provincial governors). These figures would now serve as representatives for the ministries of the central government and oversee their province's politics, finances, police and courts.⁶ In 1864, the Provincial Reform Law further clarified the structure of provincial government. A new system of *vilayets* (provinces) replaced the old system of *eyelets*, the administrative units each centered on a significant metropolitan area.

Macedonia itself was not defined as province. What came to be defined as "geographic Macedonia" in the later nineteenth century would stretch across the *vilayet* of Selânik, centered



⁵ On the reform period, see Kemal Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 37-43; Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume II: Reform, Revolution and Republic: the Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 71-89; and Roderick Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

⁶ Davison, 137.

on Salonika⁷, the *vilayet* of Monastir,⁸ centered on the city of the same name, and the *vilayet* of Kosovo, centered on Pristina (see Figure 2, previous page).⁹

The Law of 1864 further divided the *vilayets* into *sanjaks* (districts), *kazas* (sub-districts), *kariyes* (large villages, communes or municipal quarters of more than fifty households) and *nahiyes* (smaller villages and hamlets.) The Sublime Porte directly appointed governors and officials at the *vilayet*, *sanjak* and *kaza* levels, while villages elected their own village headmen. Roderick Davison notes that the reform encouraged both local centralization and regional decentralization:

Viewed from Istanbul, [the Provincial Reform Law] represented a decentralization of authority wherever the *vali* could act on his own initiative. Viewed from the provinces, this represented considerable centralization in the *vilayet*.¹⁰

In the event, local notables were usually able to stymie the effectiveness of the *vali* and limit the power of the reforms to centralize local government, preserving local autonomy despite efforts at provincial centralization.¹¹

The sheer diversity of the Macedonian *vilayets* aided the preservation of autonomy. Geographically, mountain ranges divided the three provinces into a series of valleys with markedly different climates, resources and historical

⁷ Thessalonika from 1912. Salonika is used here to refer to the city, but Selânik is used to refer to the Ottoman administrative district.

⁸ Bitola from 1912.

⁹ Simultaneously, the boundaries of the *sanjaks* within the Macedonian *vilayets* were gerrymandered in such a way as to reinforce the predominance of the Muslim population. See Nadine Lange Akhund, *The Macedonian Question, 1893-1908: From Western Sources* (Boulder and New York: East European Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1998), 14.

¹⁰ Davison, 147.

¹¹ Davison, 140-146; Karpat, 30.

patterns of settlement. The region further lacked navigable rivers to readily connect these valleys. The Ottoman rail network, even at the end of the nineteenth century, did not serve to link the *vilayets* together, effectively connecting only a narrow strip between Skopje, Monastir and Salonika.

Ethnic variety further divided the *vilayets*. The diversity of the Macedonian *vilayets'* two million inhabitants was pronounced even within a multi-ethnic empire: the Ottoman census of 1912 found 1,150,000 Slavs, 400,000 Turks, 300,000 Greeks, 200,000 Vlachs, 120,000 Albanians and 100,000 Jews in Macedonia.¹² This population was distributed as a hodge-podge throughout the region, with the result that only a few *sanjaks* possessed a pronounced ethnic majority. While localities might possess clear majorities, the diversity of the districts and provinces hindered the development of an overlapping territorial-national consciousness of the kind Charles Maier emphasizes as crucial to state

¹² Elisabeth Barker, *Macedonia: Its Place in Balkan Power Politics* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 12. Demographic statistics for Macedonia, however, varied greatly and this can only be considered an approximation at best, since Ottoman censuses continued to record religion rather than ethnicity. Such ethnic figures were determined either by recording the separate *millets*, or through secondary analysis. Duncan Perry notes the need for caution: for example, that in 1918 estimates of Macedonia's population ranged from a low end of 350,000 to a high of 2,911,700, an almost logarithmic difference. This new attention to ethnic categories moreover neglected confessional differences — roughly 150,000 of this Slav population were Muslims by confession. See Perry, *Politics of Terror*, 19; also H.R. Wilkinson, *Maps & Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1951). Fikret Adanir, "The Macedonians in the Ottoman Empire, 1878-1912," in Andreas Kapeler, ed., *The Formation of National Elites: Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850-1940* (Dartmouth: New York University Press and the European Science Foundation, 1992), 164, breaks population figures down further, excluding the predominantly Albanian *sanjaks* of Kosovo, finding Macedonia to be 52 percent Slav, 22 percent Turkish, 10 percent Greek, 6 percent Albanian, 4 percent Vlach, 3 percent Jewish and 2 percent Roma.

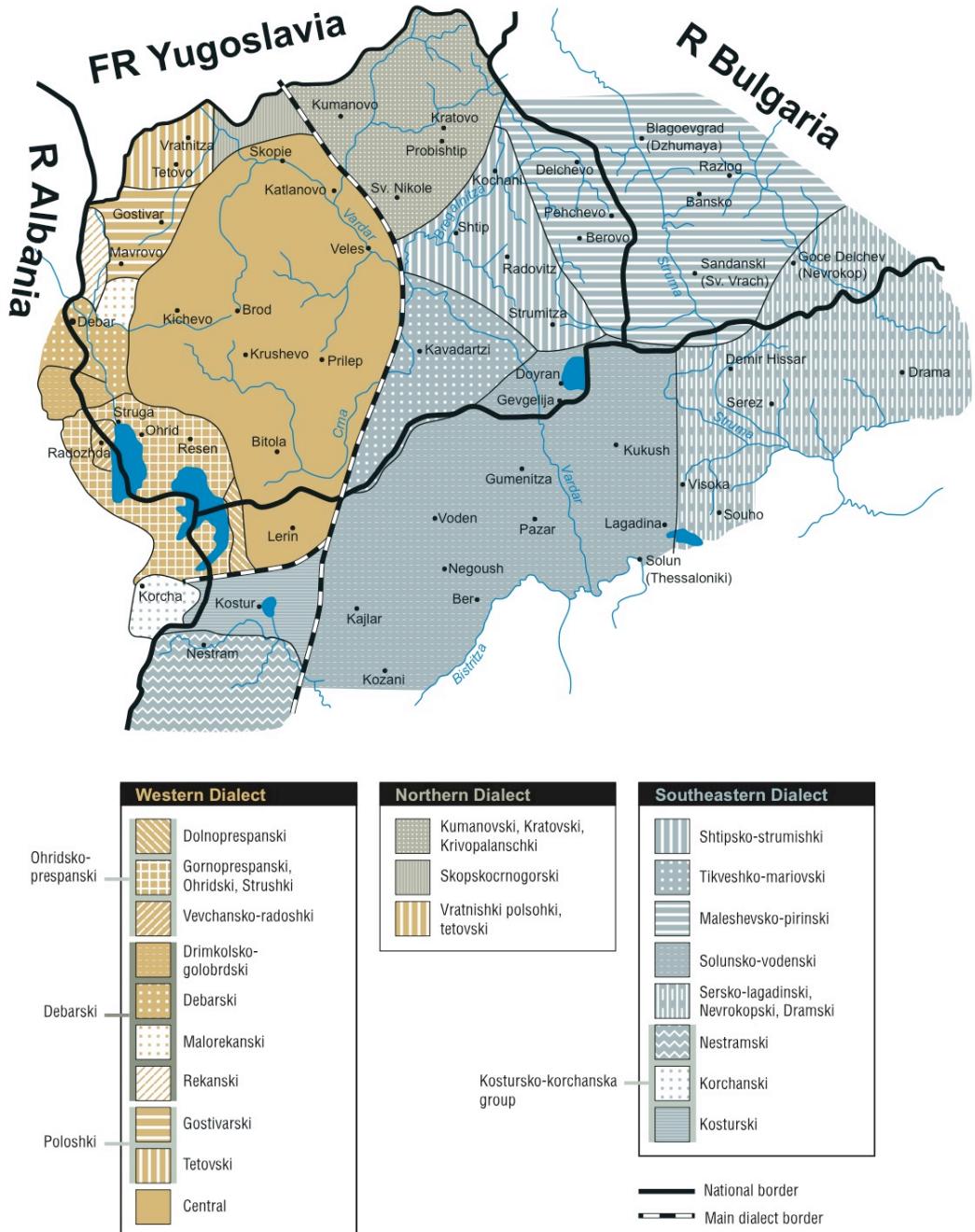
power. The province further ranged from metropolitan centers such as Salonika (the second largest city in the Ottoman Balkans) to rural mountainous regions with low population densities.

Dialectal variations further divided the Slav population of the three *vilayets*. Figure 3, next page, notes the boundaries of dialects spoken in geographic Macedonia.¹³ These blend into Bulgarian dialects in the east and Serbian dialects in the north. Pirin was generally unified in terms of dialect. Most of the region shares the Maleshevo-Pirin dialect; the exception is the southeast, including Nevrokop, which falls within the Seres-Lagadin dialect and is mutually intelligible with the former. These two dialects in Macedonia are the closest to the Shop dialect of northwestern Bulgaria. Linguistically Pirin thus lay between the eastern Slav dialects that served as the basis of the new Bulgarian literary language, and the western Slav dialects that would be proposed in the 1860s as the basis for separate Macedonian and “Western Bulgarian” languages.¹⁴

¹³ The boundaries as presented here reflect the position of Macedonian linguists. Generally, Bulgarian linguists accept this schema of local dialects. The point of conflict remains over the relation between this group of dialects relative to those in Bulgaria, and whether dialects in Macedonia form a separate language. My thanks to Angel Angelov for fruitful discussions on this topic.

¹⁴ Key dialectical differences between eastern and western dialects included the use of the letter т, “yat.” Grammatically, in eastern dialects of Bulgarian it is pronounced as я (“ya”), in the west as е (“eh”). Thus the word for milk varies from “*mlyako*” to “*mleko*.” Similarly, the word for “what” in the east is *kakvo*, in the west *shto* (compared to *shta* in Serbia). The future tense is conjugated with *shte* in the east, *kje* in parts of the west. In some rural extremes, these dialects were not always mutually intelligible. The contemporary Bulgarian position is summarized in “A Short Explanation,” *Loza* 2 (1892), 92-93, reprinted in Dimitur Kosev and Hristo Hristov, eds., *Documents and Materials on the History of the Bulgarian People* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata akademiiia na naukite, 1969), 252-253.

Figure 3
Map of Dialects in Geographic Macedonia



Map by Mois Moshev, based on Blazhe Koneski, *A Historical Phonology of the Macedonian Language* (Hidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983).

The Pirin kazas

Pirin paralleled the new pattern for the larger *vilayets* on a smaller scale in terms of administrative divisions. Putting Pirin entirely within the Seres *sanjak* of the Selânik *vilayet*, the Law of 1864 divided the region into five *kazas*, each centered around a local town: Gorna Dzhumaia, Razlog,¹⁵ Melnik, Nevrokop and Petrich.¹⁶ These *kazas* differed from each other somewhat in terms of geography, demography and economy. The Gorna Dzhumaia *kaza*, to the northwest, was oriented on the Struma valley; so was the Petrich *kaza*, but the latter included a series of plains around the town. The Melnik *kaza* lay partially in the valley and partially in the western foothills of the Pirin range. Mountainous terrain dominated the Razlog and Nevrokop *kazas* to the east, where the land supported scattered pastoralism but

Figure 4
The Five Pirin Kazas



not intensive agriculture or a dense population. All were similar, however, in being relatively rural and sparsely populated.

¹⁵ While termed Mehomiia under the Ottoman Empire, the inhabitants of the town consistently referred to it as Razlog and the term is used throughout in this study.

¹⁶ A small portion of southeastern Pirin was included in the *kaza* of Demi-Hisar.

Table 2
Population in the Pirin kazas, c. 1890¹⁷

	Slav	Greek	Jewish	Pomak	Roma	Turkish	Vlach	Total
Petrich Kaza	26,243	n/a	n/a	1,950	1,750	15,700	n/a	45,643
	57.5%			4.3%	3.8%	34.4%		
Petrich town	3,749	n/a	n/a	325	250	2,650	n/a	6,974
	53.8%			4.7%	3.6%	38.0%		
Villages	22,494	n/a	n/a	1,625	1,500	13,050	n/a	38,669
	58.2%			4.2%	3.9%	33.8%		
Melnik kaza	15,492	2,050	n/a	1,000	955	5,360	780	25,637
	40.1%	5.3%		2.6%	2.5%	13.9%	2.0%	
Melnik town*	1,200	2,050	n/a	n/a	525	900	30	5,032
	23.8%	40.7%			10.4%	17.9%	0.6%	
Villages*	14,292	n/a	n/a	1,000	430	4,460	750	20,605
	69.4%			4.9%	2.1%	21.6%	3.6%	
Gorna Dzhumaia kaza	19,112	11	50	3,570	650	4,990	521	28,904
	66.1%	0.04%	0.2%	12.4%	22.5%	17.3%	1.8%	
G. Dzhumaia town	800	11	50	n/a	50	4,925	65	5,901
	13.6%	0.2%	.9%		.9%	83.5%	1.1%	
Villages	18,312	n/a	n/a	3,570	600	65	456	23,003
	79.6%			15.5%	2.6%	0.3%	2.0%	
Nevrokop kaza	34,312	n/a	72	28,335	2,130	10,605	441	76,395
	44.9%		0.1%	37.1%	2.8%	13.9%	0.6%	
Nevrokop town	930	n/a	72	n/a	30	5,350	303	6,685
	13.9%		1.1%		4.5%	80.0%	4.5%	
Villages	33,382	n/a	n/a	28,335	2,100	5,255	138	69,710
	47.9%			40.1%	3.0%	7.5%	0.2%	
Razlog kaza	21,500	n/a	n/a	11,500	600	n/a	60	33,550
	64.1%			34.3%	1.8%		0.2%	
Razlog town*	3,102	n/a	n/a	1,500	n/a	n/a	30	4,632
	67.0%			32.4%			0.7%	
Bansko (town)*	5,700	n/a	n/a	n/a	432	n/a	n/a	6,132
	93.0%				7.1%			
Babek (town)*	n/a	n/a	n/a	6,000	n/a	n/a	n/a	6,000
				100%				
Villages*	12,698	n/a	n/a	4,000	168	n/a	30	16,786
	75.7%			23.8%	1.0%		0.2%	
	Slav	Greek	Jewish	Pomak	Roma	Turkish	Vlach	Total
Pirin total	116,659	2,061	122	46,455	6,735	36,735	2,652	209,629
	55.7%	9.8%	0.1%	22.2%	3.2%	17.5%	1.3%	

* Extrapolated from household estimates.

¹⁷ Based on figures from Vasil Kunčhev, *Sbornik: Narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina, kniga XI* (Sofia: Durzhavna pechatnitsa, 1894) reprinted as *Makedonija: Etnografija i statistika* (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov," 1996), 270-271, 284-85, 300-301; and Vasil Kunčhev, *Sbornik: Narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina, kniga XIII* (Sofia: Durzhavna pechatnitsa, 1896) reprinted as *Makedonija: Etnografija i statistika* (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov," 1996), 383-387. For comparison, see the population analysis by Gavrilova, 47-48.

As noted in Table 2, the region's demographic proportions were generally similar to those of the *vilayets* as a whole. The settlement of Turks in the region and the conversion of local inhabitants to Islam (chiefly the Pomaks, ethnic Slav Muslims, but also including many Roma) resulted in a region in which Christian Slav inhabitants made up between 50-60 percent of the total population, but only 37 percent of the population of the region's towns.¹⁸

These ethnic populations were not scattered evenly throughout the province. The five towns of Pirin were primarily inhabited by Muslims (usually ethnically Turkish) but with Christian Slavic-speakers in separate quarters. Villages in the region might be Christian Slavic-speakers, Muslim Turkish-speakers, or Muslim Slavic-speakers (Pomak). On a broad level, Turks clustered to the south, Orthodox Christian Slavs were strongest proportionately in the north, Pomaks (Muslim Slavs) were generally limited to the eastern regions of the *kazas* and Greeks were almost solely found in the town of Melnik.¹⁹ In the eastern Pirin *kazas*, Christian Bulgarian-speaking villages predominated on the

¹⁸ Ottoman censuses recorded confession but not ethnicity; figures here draw on Vasil Kunchov's work in the late nineteenth century. Although sympathetic to Bulgarian claims, he did compare his findings to Ottoman census data. His ratios between ethnicities are similar, but he often finds a larger population, perhaps because Ottoman censuses recorded households rather than individuals. On bias in census data, see H.R. Wilkinson, *Maps & Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1951); also Raina Gavrilova, *Bulgarian Urban Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 38.

¹⁹ Contemporary Bulgarian accounts argue that Pomaks, despite differences in faith, are ethnically indistinguishable from other Bulgarians. However, from 1878 to 1905 the censuses conducted by the Bulgarian government listed Pomaks as "Turks." Given the importance of confessional identity in the shaping of a Bulgarian national consciousness in the nineteenth century, this arguably excluded the Pomaks, who Bulgarian national discourse termed as ethnically Bulgarian only in the twentieth century.

eastern slopes of the Pirin range, with Muslim Bulgarian-speaking villages further east on the western slopes of the Rhodopi Mountains. Turkish-speaking villages and towns were located along the river valley that linked Thessalonika and Sofia. Greek-speakers were concentrated in the town of Melnik.

On the local level, the different ethnicities tended to cluster together. Although some Pirin villages were mixed in terms of ethnic population, few were evenly divided and most possessed a large majority. The rural-urban divide further complicated the region's demographics. Over a third (37.7 percent) of Pirin's Turkish inhabitants lived in towns, as did all of the region's Greek and Jewish population, 22.9 percent of the Vlachs, and 15.6 percent of Roma, all ahead of the Bulgarians — and far ahead of the Pomaks, who were overwhelmingly rural (99 percent).

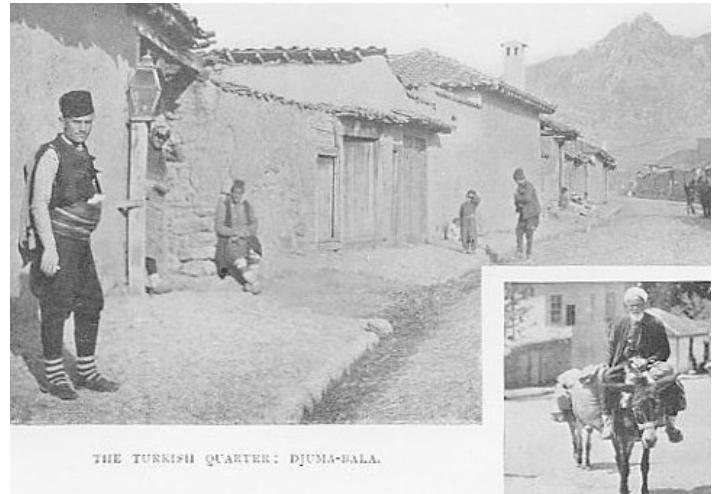
Such regional averages, however, mask the fact that these imbalances varied from *kaza* to *kaza*. In the Gorna Dzhumaia *kaza*, for example, the urban percentage of the total population (20.4 percent) was not only notably higher than average for the region, but the sub-district's Turkish inhabitants were overwhelmingly urban (98.7 percent) and accounted for 80 percent of the town's total population.²⁰ Nevrokop was a similar overwhelmingly Turkish town in an area otherwise inhabited by Slav Christians. In Melnik, however, Turks inhabited a cluster of villages (83.2 percent rural) around a predominantly Greek town. Both the town of Petrich and surrounding villages were relatively mixed between

²⁰The Bulgarian component of Gorna Dzhumaia had been larger prior to 1878, but many of the town's inhabitants emigrated to Bulgaria following its independence. See Chapter Three for an account of the Gorna Dzhumaia uprising and its aftermath.

Slav and Turkish inhabitants. Razlog, to the northeast, was the other extreme with both urban and rural areas dominated by Christian and Muslim Slavs. These ethnic communities pursued their own, local autonomy within the *kaza* in the late nineteenth century — particularly village communities which remained by and large economically self-sufficient.

The Pirin *kazas* were predominantly rural-based economies, more than most other *kazas* in Macedonia. The urban centers of the Macedonian *vilayets* grew through much of the nineteenth century; in addition to Salonika both Monastir (50,000 inhabitants by 1898) and Seres (35,000 in 1906) were significant urban areas; smaller towns such as Skopje, Shtip and Strumitsa grew into significant regional centers as well.²¹ The towns of the Pirin *kaza*, in contrast, remained limited in size. They failed to grow beyond their roles as locations for local crafts guilds and as market towns for surrounding villages.²² The problem lay in recent economic history. The strong Ottoman Empire of the early modern era could effectively foster trade, military and other links between localities. In the

Figure 5
A Pirin Town: Gorna Dzhumaia in 1903.



Original from Frederick Moore, *The Balkan Trail*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1906, 242.

²¹ Fikret Adanir, "The Macedonians in the Ottoman Empire," 164.

²² See Gavrilova, 30-31, for a comparison of the Pirin towns with other towns in the Bulgarian lands.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ottoman Pirin was part of a thriving trade in wool, hides and animal skins, exported from the Macedonian lands overland to Vienna and Leipzig.²³ But as the Empire's trade routes faced more internal disruption in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, localities in peripheral areas enjoyed increased economic autonomy as well.

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and Bulgaria's subsequent independence disrupted the regional economy. Salonika's overland trade to the Bulgarian lands²⁴ of the Empire had run along the Struma river and thus through the towns of Petrich and Gorna Dzhumaia. Bulgarian independence cut off much of the previous trade between the Bulgarian lands and Ottoman centers in Salonika and Istanbul.²⁵ The border also divided Gorna Dzhumaia as a center of local trade from a number of villages to the north. Dupnitsa subsequently emerged as a market town to supply them, to the detriment of the Pirin *kazas*.²⁶ Eastern Pirin's role as a trade route declined, and the region's economy was thereafter exclusively agricultural. Seres emerged as the commercial center for Pirin's foodstuffs and industrial crops, transshipping some of them farther on to

²³ Bruce McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe: Taxation, trade and the struggle for land, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 134.

²⁴ Administratively, the territory of Bulgaria was divided between the *eyalets* of Rumelia and Siliistra. In 1864, territories from both *eyalets* were subdivided into the *vilayets* of Tuna (northern modern Bulgaria above the Balkan Mountains, including the southern Dobrudzha) and Rumelia (southern Bulgaria between the Balkan Mountains). The use of the term "Bulgarian lands" is meant to refer to the territory encompassed by the *vilayets* of Tuna and Rumelia.

²⁵ On the decline of Ottoman-Bulgarian trade following independence, see Michael Palarivet, *The Balkan Economies, c 1800-1914: Evolution without Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²⁶ Vasil Sharkov, *Grad Gorna Dzhumaia, minalo i dnes* (Sofia: Pechatnitsa na Armeiskiia voenno-izdatelski fond, 1929), 137.

Ottoman Salonika.²⁷ With the independence of Bulgaria, the region was relegated to an economic hinterland of the Aegean coast. By the latter half of the nineteenth century the Pirin economy was divided between the eastern mountain regions with sustenance farming and pastoralism and a western valley plain of *chiflik* agricultural estates worked by sharecroppers and villages surrounding towns such as Gorna Dzhumaia on the Salonika-Sofia trade route.

Pirin produced annual harvests of nearly 20,000 metric tons of corn, 13,500 tons each of wheat and rye, as well as smaller amounts of oats, barley, millet and rice. Different soil conditions and climate meant that the exact ratios of these crops varied between the *kazas*. *Chiflik* estates dominated western Pirin along the Struma valley, encompassing roughly three-quarters of the arable land in the Petrich, Melnik and Gorna Dzhumaia *kazas*.²⁸ Turks or (more rarely) Muslim Slavs owned these large hereditary estates, dividing agricultural land along confessional (and ethnic) lines.²⁹ To the east of the Pirin Range, however, small peasant farms and communal pastures owned by Christian and Muslim

²⁷ Katarjiev, *Vreme na zreenje I*, 108.

²⁸ For an overview of local *chiflik* ownership, see Hristo Hristov, *Agrarnite otnosheniiia v Makedonii prez XIX V. i nachaloto na XX V.* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarksata akademiiia na naukite, 1964). On the earlier establishment of estates in the Struma Valley, see Metodija Sokoloski, “Petrichkata nahija vo XVI vek,” *Istoriia* 16:2 (1980), 23-48.

²⁹ The pattern of agricultural division was reflected in the later paramilitary movements; those areas in the east where the *chiflik* structure was absent proved to be areas of revolutionary fervor in the 1890s. This contradicts Bulgarian Marxist historiography that stresses an “anti-feudal” nature to the national awakening. The mountainous and poorer areas of eastern Pirin were unattractive for large *chiflik* estates, and saw little Muslim (or Greek) immigration. The role of local educated elites in eastern villages and towns was thus “left” to the Slav inhabitants relatively uncontested. The question of land reform was of significant political importance.

Slavs predominated: Razlog, less than 50 kilometers from Gorna Dzhumaia, had no *chiflik* estates in the late nineteenth century.

Access to commercial markets impacted the pattern of agricultural activity as well. Petrich, the closest *kaza* to the Aegean coast, traded apples and grapes to both Salonika and Seres.³⁰ Cattle and sheep were herded in large numbers — the region's more than 300,000 sheep alone represented roughly half the total sheep herded in the Seres *sanjak* — and driven to markets in Seres and Salonika. Pirin also saw the cultivation of “industrial” crops, particularly along the Struma river valley in the western *kazas*. Cotton and tobacco were grown extensively, the Gorna Dzhumaia *kaza* alone annually producing roughly 400 metric tons of cotton and 224 metric tons of tobacco in the late nineteenth century as well as 30 tons of flax and hemp. Sesame seeds, poppy seeds and opium were cultivated in the Petrich *kaza* and to a lesser extent in the Melnik *kaza*; far more important in the latter was the 1,100 metric tons of grapes grown each year plus nearly 11 metric tons a year of honey.³¹ Sharecroppers on the *chiflik* estates grew most of these commercial crops, the role taken in the east by small peasant farms. Tobacco, cotton, foodstuffs as well as wool and hides were traded at local market towns and then transported south to the larger markets of the Aegean coast, for further sale either to Istanbul or to be exported abroad.

Such crops encouraged a limited local development of processing facilities — Petrich, for example, was a source of sesame oil not only for Seres but for

³⁰ Kunchov, 265.

³¹ For local agricultural production and livestock figures, see Kunchov, 265, 273, 284-5, 302-3, 387; Ivan Katarjiev, *Borba do pobeda* (Skopje: Misla, 1983), 88-95.

Melnik and villages in the southwestern *kazas*, while Melnik was the *sanjak*'s center for wine production. Nevrokop emerged as a center for textile production.³² Such industries were divided by ethnicity, with Greeks, Jews and Turks predominating among the merchants trading in these goods — and among other urban professions such as doctors, telegraph operators, clerks, etc.³³ A Bulgarian merchant class had been established in the nineteenth century, but varied in size and influence among the *kazas*, strongest in eastern predominantly Slav settlements like Bansko and Razlog.

Such minimal urban activity, and the continued concentration of land in *chiflik* estates, could not absorb an increasing surplus of labor in Pirin or in the Macedonian lands as a whole. The result was extensive *pechalbarstvo* — labor migration. Thousands of local inhabitants traveled to the Aegean coast, to Thrace and to Bulgaria for seasonal work, returning in the autumn.³⁴ The widespread export of goods and of labor extended the horizons of peasants trading their wares and labor migrants. Export thus encouraged interaction between local communities, yet at the same time it limited the overall level of internal trade and commercial integration within the Pirin *kazas* (and of Macedonia more generally). Even in terms of trade, local villages frequently traded their products directly to outside factors from Seres and Salonika rather than within a network of local trade.

³² Katarjiev, 94.

³³ See Kunchov, 298; Gavrilova, 134-135.

³⁴ Kunchov, 297; see also Fikret Adanır, "The National Question and the Genesis and Development of Socialism in the Ottoman Empire: the Case of Macedonia," in Mene Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher, *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1923* (London: British Academic Press, 1994), 31.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Pirin was thus a “fractured” region in administrative, ethnic and commercial terms. Local elites accepted the Bulgarian *Vuzrazhdane* in the nineteenth century not simply from the desire to unite into a larger national consciousness or for the movement’s promise of practical reforms. Rather, local elites used the Awakening to address conflicts within a district divided along confessional as well as ethnic lines. And the rise of such conflicts was a legacy of the history of the Ottoman state in the preceding century.

Ottoman State Structure: The Legacies of Reform and Revolt

Bulgaria, like other Southeastern European countries, is a post-imperial state. The conquest of the medieval Bulgarian kingdoms in the late fourteenth century meant nearly five centuries of Ottoman rule. Indigenous histories present this period as “frozen history” in which Christians faced a static existence under the “*turkso igo*” or “Turkish Yoke.”³⁵ As argued in Chapter One, the period of Ottoman rule produced a “usable past” which national movements drew upon extensively in the creation and shaping of identity. Ottoman imperial rule not only

³⁵ Leften Stavrianos advances the “frozen development” argument in *The Balkans Since 1453* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 13. Yet the Balkans were not “frozen.” Indigenous peoples during the Ottoman period saw economic, cultural and political development, and Ottoman rule itself became a crucial myth in indigenous history. “Frozen time” itself has a crucial symbolic role, allowing emergent national movements to stress a perceived cultural stasis, and thus continuity, between medieval empires and new, independent states since Ottoman occupation. See also Vera Mutafchieva, “The Notion of the Other: The Turk, the Jew and the Gypsy,” in Antonina Zhelyazkova, ed., *Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility Between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria* (Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations Foundation, 1994), 22, 54.

served in and of itself as a negative “Other,” but specific imperial problems and reforms shaped the conditions under which the Balkan national movements would arise.

This chapter accordingly explores these conditions in light of how both Bulgarian and Macedonian historiography portray Ottoman rule. Both traditions argue for a nationally-based struggle against an oppressive Ottoman regime. While the emergence of national consciousness was central to the nineteenth century Awakening and armed resistance, the lengthy experience of autonomy and local identity in the Empire is equally important to understanding why it would be difficult for the Bulgarian central state to easily obtain control over local institutions in Pirin. In approaching the Ottoman Empire the emphasis here is on the historiographical traditions of secondary sources.

By the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire controlled Southeastern Europe as a centralized dynastic state in which the Sultan was able to personally direct an efficient military and administration. Practices such as *timar* estates — conquered land held by the Sultan and granted to his followers only temporarily for their support — helped the Sultan fund expansionary wars without losing control of a growing empire. Moreover, the Sultan’s centralized administration was not oppressive. Bulgarian *boiars* (nobles) were briefly retained as allies and vassals even after the conquest.³⁶ In contrast to the conflicts between rival

³⁶ Halil Inalcik, Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber, trans., *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 12-13, 14; Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26; Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 180.

Balkan kingdoms, the Empire promised stability, lower taxes, and allowed local elites to retain property and position.³⁷ Ottoman policy *did* discriminate against Christian subjects. They were required to pay “poll taxes,” provide children under the *devşirme* levy to supply the Janissary Corps,³⁸ and were restricted from wearing certain fabrics, repairing or constructing churches, ringing church bells, or bearing arms.³⁹ Such confessionally-based restrictions were, however, more tolerant than those of contemporary European states and frequent exemptions to restrictions (on church-building, for example), were granted.

The eighteenth century, however, revealed weaknesses within the state structure of the Empire and the central state began to lose control over the provinces. A series of wars with Austria and Russia resulted in large war debts; the defeats of 1699, 1718 and 1774 were particularly significant, resulting in the loss of large territories and the revenues from those territories. A series of weak sultans and viziers acquiesced to the decentralization of power: the Porte, finding its own tax system unable to cope with the costs of the wars, turned to “tax farming” and sold the rights to collect revenue. The *ayans*, provincial elites, parlayed tax farming into increased control over provincial administration —

³⁷ Imber, 186. In the long run, however, retaining position might require conversion to Islam.

³⁸ The *devşirme* system “taxed” male children from Christian peasant families. These children were trained as soldiers and administrators for the Ottoman Empire and converted to Islam. The intent of the system was to provide the Sultan with a body of men drawn from outside established interests of the Muslim ruling class of the Empire.

³⁹ Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University press, 2002), 49; Dennis Hupchick, *The Bulgarians in the Seventeenth Century: Slav Orthodox Society and Culture Under Ottoman Rule* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1993), 3-4 and 19-20; Gavrilova, 69.

including local army garrisons. Provincial landowners among the *ayans* took similar advantage of weakened central authority to transform *timar* land holdings, originally granted only temporarily by the Sultan in return for service, into hereditary *chiflik* estates.⁴⁰ At the local level, individuals were able to negotiate increased autonomy for villages, town quarters and sub-districts from Ottoman authorities. Such individuals gradually evolved a distinct local elite, referred to as *chorbadzhiia* in both Macedonian and Bulgarian historiography. The term translates literally as “providers of soup,” referring to their role in both charity and patronage.⁴¹ Drawn from both the Christian and Muslim population, the *chorbadzhiia* portrayed themselves as defenders of the peasant population while using their position to play local *ayans* and Ottoman officials against the authority of the central state.

A weakened Ottoman state responded by recognizing the power of rebels against the Sultan and attempting to co-opt them into the administration, preferring a generally diminished presence in the provinces to open conflict and civil war.⁴² By the end of the eighteenth century, the loss of central power had grown great enough that the *ayans* could act as warlords. They fought private wars within the Empire’s borders, such as the conflict in the

⁴⁰ Goffman, 115-116; Leften Stavrianos, “Antecedents to the Balkan Revolutions of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Modern History* 29:4 (December 1957), 340.

⁴¹ The term itself is Turkish and drawn from the Ottoman Janissary Corps, who used it to refer to officers. The soup-pot and the spoon were symbols of the Janissaries.

⁴² Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: the Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 30.

Bulgarian lands between İsmail Pasha of Seres and Osman Pasvantoğlu in Vidin.⁴³ The administrative weakness of the Porte was compounded by Ottoman economic decline in the eighteenth century. The Empire went from a position of rough equality in trade to an exporter of raw goods and an importer of finished goods, to the detriment of Ottoman urban artisans, internal trade and imperial finances.⁴⁴

For the Bulgarian inhabitants of the Empire, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century became known as the *kurdzhaliistvo* — the “time of the *kurdzhali*,” irregular Muslim soldiers who deserted from the Ottoman army and turned either to the service of the *ayans* or to banditry.⁴⁵ *Kurdzhali* bands ravaged Bulgaria from the 1790s through the 1820s, with a few isolated groups persisting into the 1840s; and the Christian inhabitants of the Balkans, formally forbidden from bearing firearms, suffered particularly from the upheaval. Pirin’s trade connections diminished in this period, with much of the Christian Slav population retreating to the mountainous areas of the east. The failure of Ottoman Authorities to secure order led to growing popular

⁴³ Kemal Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 336-339; Halil İnalçik and Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 665-666; Trajan Stoianovich, “Land Tenure and Related Sectors of the Balkan Economy, 1600-1800,” *Journal of Economic History* 13:4 (1953), 400-401.

⁴⁴ Kemal Karpat, “The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3 (1972), 245.

⁴⁵ Duncan M. Perry, *Stefan Stambolov and the Emergence of Modern Bulgaria, 1870-1895* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 5. On the destruction of provincial order more broadly, see Peter Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), 233-247.

resentment towards the Sublime Porte by both Muslims and non-Muslims in the provinces. In the Balkan provinces of the Empire, the decline in the authority and prestige of the Porte helped fuel the resulting national awakenings. For the peasantry, economic stagnation, corruption and political discrimination increasingly characterized life in the Ottoman Balkan provinces. Outside of the towns, the Empire was unable to establish order.⁴⁶

By the early nineteenth century, for most of the Empire's Balkan population, there was little sense of identification with the Sultan's regime or loyalty to the Empire as a whole: rather, the Empire contained "disparate groups that were to a large degree self-centered and self-sufficient."⁴⁷ In these circumstances, provinces of the Empire could break away and form autonomous or independent states — as in the case of Serbia, Greece and Egypt in the 1830s. Despite national historiographies, there was a distinct *non-national* character to these revolts. The Serbian Uprising of 1804 initially (if tactically) stressed that the revolutionaries were loyal to the Sultan and that it was in fact a revolt against corrupt local Janissary authorities of the *pashalik* of Belgrade, only later using the medieval Serbian state and independence as rallying symbols.⁴⁸

The Greek revolt saw the widespread participation by *klephths* (bandits) that cared

⁴⁶ Henry N. Brailsford, *Macedonia: Its Races and their Future* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971), 28, 46.

⁴⁷ Leften Stavrianos, "Antecedents to the Balkan Revolutions," 338.

⁴⁸ This use of symbols of the past has raised the question of whether or not the Serbian Uprisings were *national* uprisings. For two views of the question, see Daniel Chirot and Karen Barkey, "States in Search of Legitimacy: Was there Nationalism in the Balkans in the Early Nineteenth Century?," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 24:1-2 (1983), 30-45; Ivelin Sardamov, "Mandate of History: War, Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism in the South Slav Balkans." (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation: Notre Dame, 1998), 91-92.

less for the formation of a Greek state than for the financial opportunity provided by a decade of continued unrest. There were clear continuities, too, between Ottoman and autonomous rule. Miloš Obrenović ruled Serbia after 1815 in a fashion not dissimilar to the *pashas* who had ruled before him and served as the “Prince of Serbia,” a vassal of the Sultan. The independence of these regions signified extremes of the broad trend of autonomy throughout the Empire as much as a trend towards “national liberation” in the region.

The Greek and Serbian cases demonstrated that successful revolution and independence from the Empire was possible. Over the nineteenth century national movements emerged in both states, gradually emerging to play prominent political roles in each state: the *Načertanije* of 1844 in Serbia and the *Megali Idea* in Greece. It required succeeding decades for a Serbian identity to take predominant hold over other internal rivalries and identities (such as the conflict in Serbia between the rival Karageorgević and Obrenović dynasties). While Greek preponderance in eighteenth-century Ottoman merchant shipping and the Orthodox Church had helped to forge common interests among commercial and intellectual elites, here a unifying national movement was also slow to emerge given local rivalries and significant regional differences.⁴⁹ Not least among these was the fact that Greek dialects were not mutually intelligible. In the Bulgarian context, the importance of the Greek and Serbian national movements was initially as a model for national independence. By the later

⁴⁹ See Victor Roudometof, "From Rum Millet to Greek Nation: Enlightenment, Secularization, and National Identity in Ottoman Balkan Society, 1453-1821" *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 16:1 (May 1998), 11-48.

nineteenth century, however, both had become rivals to the emergence of a separate Bulgarian movement.

The Bulgarian National Awakening

Bulgaria's close proximity to the center of Ottoman power in Istanbul worked against the prospects of obtaining political autonomy in the early nineteenth century. Yet a Bulgarian national revival had arguably already begun, in a limited fashion, in the late eighteenth century.⁵⁰ The *Istoriia slavianobolgarskaiia* of Paisii Hilendarski, a monk at Mount Athos (originally from Bansko in Pirin), exhorted Bulgarians in the 1760s to embrace their past.

It is necessary and useful for you to know what is already known about the deeds of your fathers, just as all other tribes and peoples know their kin and their tongue, they have their history and every literate man knows, relates and is proud of his kin and tongue.⁵¹

The disruptions of the *kurdzhaliistvo* limited the spread of any wider national movement in the late eighteenth century.⁵² The restoration of Ottoman authority over the 1820s to 1840s was crucial in creating relative stability — and creating the economic conditions to support a national movement. The destruction of the Janissary Corps and the creation of a new, regular army meant increased

⁵⁰ The periodization of the Revival, particularly the starting date, is a matter of scholarly debate. For an excellent overview, see Daskalov, 99-108.

⁵¹ Paisii Hilendarski, "Otkus ot predislovieto na "Istoriia slavianobolgarskaiia," in Dimitur Kosev, Hristo Hristov, Nikolai Todorov and Valentin Stankov, eds., *Makedonija: Sbornik ot dokumenti i materiali* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata akademiiia na naukite, 1978), 125.

⁵² Scholars have debated whether Hildemarski's work represents an already-extant Bulgarian national movement, or represents the birth of such a movement. Thomas Meininger argues that the more profitable question is what conditions allowed the later widespread dissemination and adoption of Hilendarski's message. Thomas A. Meininger, *The Formation of a Nationalist Bulgarian Intelligentsia, 1835-1878* (New York: Garland, 1987), 61.

security from bandits. It also meant a new market for Southeastern European producers of uniform cloth, foodstuffs and iron goods.⁵³ Increased autonomy in Wallachia and Moldova in the 1850s further meant that Bulgarian grain received preferential treatment in supplying Istanbul.

The result was the rise of a Bulgarian merchant class, the resulting profits used both to expand Bulgarian merchant colonies in cities such as Adrianople, Istanbul, Bucharest, Odessa and Smyrna and to begin proto-industrialization in the textile industry in upland central Bulgaria. By the mid-nineteenth century these centers were important enough in trade between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe that foreign consular offices had been opened not only in Salonika, but in Monastir, Ruse, Varna, Burgas, Plovdiv and Sofia as well.⁵⁴ But the rise of this merchant class spread unevenly; strongest in the central Balkan mountains, it was slower to emerge farther south and west where established Greek merchant communities already existed. In Pirin, the presence of the strong Turkish merchant community in Petrich and the Greek merchant community in Melnik hindered the rise of a local Slav merchant class.

It was in these rising commercial centers and in the Bulgarian merchant colony in Istanbul that the Awakening would emerge, as this “merchant class” was at the forefront of social changes. On a personal level, this group consciously adopted European social *mores*. One example is the increasing private adoption by the urban merchant class of European-style clothing rather

⁵³ Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918: A History* (New York and Boulder: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1983), 2-3.

⁵⁴ Gavrilova, 135.

than traditional Bulgarian peasant garb of embroidered shirts and (for men) vests, loose pants, and a heavy belt or (for women) embroidered skirts.⁵⁵ This group's public role was, however, more important, as patrons and supporters of local education, churches and other aspects of urban life.⁵⁶ Unlike previous schools, in which education had been conducted in Greek, these taught in the Bulgarian language. The first opened in Gabrovo in 1835, with the first Bulgarian-language girl's school following in 1840, in Pleven. By the 1870s, there were over 2,000 schools within northern and central Bulgaria and eastern Rumelia, although these were often small with 10 to 50 students and a single teacher. A second teacher usually taught girls, since education remained segregated by sex. In Pirin the first such school opened in 1844 in Gorna Dzhumaia, teaching either in local Slav dialect or (later in the century) in the Bulgarian literary language based on eastern Bulgarian dialects.

Even in post-Communist Bulgarian and Macedonian historiography, the Marxist framework still sees this period as a reaction to Ottoman "feudalism," particularly the unequal economic conditions between the Christian and Muslim peoples in the Empire.⁵⁷ Rather than constituting an economic rebellion against

⁵⁵ Gavrilova, 138-159.

⁵⁶ Nikolai Genchev, *Bulgarsko Vuzrazhdane* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Otechestveniia front, 1988), 90; James Clarke, "The Bulgarian Renaissance," in Dennis P. Hupchick, ed., *The Pen and the Sword: Studies in Bulgarian History by James F. Clarke*, (Boulder: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1988), 173.

⁵⁷ For example, Katarjiev, 35; also Iliia Todev, *Bulgarsko natsionalno dvizhenie v Trakiia 1800-1878* (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov," 1994). See also the discussion in Daskalov, 73-78. This approach stresses economic relations within the Empire, condemning Ottoman rule as backward. This

the Ottoman Empire, however, Ottoman officials welcomed the rise of the *chorbadzhia* as a Bulgarian commercial class and educated local elites.⁵⁸ The *chorbadzhia* served as potential allies in the ongoing reforms of the nineteenth century, particularly since the Ottomans promised reforms in the *millet* system (such as the proposed Hatt-i Hümayun of 1856) that would grant non-Muslims equal rights within the Empire. For the Porte, the emergence of a Bulgarian national movement served as a counterweight to the more substantial threat posed by expansionary Serbian and, particularly, Greek national movements. Each had begun by the mid-nineteenth century began to claim Ottoman territory on the basis of the perceived national consciousness of its inhabitants therein.

How was such a tactical alliance was possible? The Bulgarian Awakening was a reaction to the perceived dangers of cultural and religious Hellenization rather than to Ottoman political rule or economic conditions.⁵⁹ The goal was to establish Bulgarian educational and religious institutions to counter the Greek ones already in place. Hildenarski's work had focused on exactly this point as he exhorted "Bulgarians" to obtain a greater knowledge of a Bulgarian language and past:

But there are those who do not like to know about their Bulgarian kin and turn to foreign culture and to foreign tongue and do not care for their Bulgarian tongue but learn how to read and speak Greek and feel ashamed to call themselves Bulgarians. O, you misshapen creature,

dovetailed well with nationalist approaches to the Empire, but Ottoman rule was not feudalistic in a European sense.

⁵⁸ On the Ottoman historic tolerance of autonomy, see Stavrianos, "Antecedents," 338; for the cooperation of Ottoman authorities with the new Bulgarian intelligentsia, see Meininger, 74.

⁵⁹ See Todev, 90-139.

bereft of reason! Why are you ashamed to call yourself Bulgarian and do not read and speak your own language?⁶⁰

Greeks predominated within the institutions and hierarchy of the Orthodox Christian *millet*.⁶¹ Although autocephalous Slavic-rite Orthodox hierarchies had been established in the medieval period, the last such hierarchy — the Archbishopric of Ohrid — had been dominated by Greek clergy since the time of Ottoman conquest, and was abolished in any case in 1767. By the early nineteenth century Greek ritual and liturgical language eclipsed traditional Slav rites and the use of Old Church Slavonic in churches throughout the Slav-inhabited *vilayets* of the Empire.⁶² Similarly, Greek predominance in Ottoman trade made Greek the language of commercial communication. The emergence of a small independent Greece in 1830 raised the prospect of wider political claims within the Empire, particularly in the Macedonian lands. Pirin, with an established Greek community in Melnik and not far from the larger Greek population of the Aegean coastline, emerged as one of the cultural battlegrounds between proponents of rival Greek and Bulgarian national movements.

⁶⁰ Hilendarski, *ibid.*, in Kosev, 125.

⁶¹ Dennis Hupchick, *The Bulgarians in the Seventeenth Century: Slav Orthodox Society and Culture under Ottoman Rule* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 1993), 51.

⁶² Both rites used archaic forms of liturgical languages dating to the medieval period: Old Church Slavonic (in Bulgaria often referred to as “Old Bulgarian”) and Koine (medieval) Greek. Although the lengthy passages and hymnals conducted during church services in these liturgical languages were generally not mutually intelligible with respectively Slav or Greek dialects in the nineteenth century, they played an important symbolic role. Of equal and practical importance was the issue of the vernacular language of the clergy conducting the relevant rites. Clergy performing the Old Church Slavonic rite were far more likely to be Slav in ethnicity and able to communicate in the local vernacular dialect with a Slav parish.

The leaders of the Bulgarian National Awakening specifically warned of the dangers of Hellenization and argued against assimilation into a Greek national movement. It was in this context that Hilendarski wrote *Istoriia slavianobolgarskaiia* in the 1760s, calling for Bulgarians (unusual in using that term, *bulgari*, rather than a stress on Christian identity or on local identities) to take pride in a common historical and cultural heritage and, in particular, their Slav language.⁶³ Bulgarian education became the cornerstone of a struggle between a largely Greek Orthodox Church and a growing Bulgarian commercial class over the role of education. Though Greek-language schools remained predominant, even increasing in number, many Orthodox Church schools taught at least some material in vernacular Bulgarian at the urging of local communities, and secular schools predominantly taught their classes in Bulgarian. By the 1850s most sizeable Bulgarian communities north of the Balkan mountain range possessed a school of some sort. In addition, Bulgarian communities had begun by the late 1850s building *chitalishta*, “reading rooms.” They served not simply as libraries but in a broader sense as community education centers by providing access to meeting halls, theaters and newspapers. Pirin was part of this broad pattern as local elites began to support the construction of new churches and schools in the 1840s and 1850s. Such efforts demonstrate that the Slav

⁶³ The text was written in Old Church Slavonic rather than Bulgarian vernacular. Old Church remained an acceptable language for scholarship for the Orthodox Church, but it opposed the use of vernacular language — including Greek. The Orthodox Church continued to use Koine Greek for liturgical purposes.

inhabitants of the region still maintained their own cultural autonomy under Ottoman rule.⁶⁴

The Bulgarian Exarchate

The Awakening, as noted above, was concerned with the cultural reorganization of the Orthodox Church to serve the needs of a Bulgarian national movement. Domination of the Church by ethnic Greeks both created a vehicle for Hellenization and provided economic and political advantages to Greeks. The Hatt-i-Sherif proclamation of 1839 that launched the *Tanzimat* reforms promised a measure of equality between Muslims and Christians. The newly-educated Bulgarian elite interpreted the Hatt-i-Sherif as offering equality between the emerging Greek and Bulgarian national movements within the Orthodox *millet*.

Such an interpretation suited not only those opposed to cultural Hellenization, but those protesting against the Church's fiscal and political policies. The Phanariot⁶⁵ domination of ecclesiastical positions in the Church and

⁶⁴ Local cultural autonomy is a point of contention in Bulgarian and Macedonian historical accounts. The relevant positions are, respectively, that local cultural developments in Macedonia were variations within a larger Bulgarian movement, and that local culture was sufficiently distinct as to form a Macedonian Revival. In fact, the two points are not necessarily mutually exclusive, since Macedonian and Bulgarian efforts can be compared to those of Serbians within a larger Slav revival in Southeastern Europe in the period. See both Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans*, and Koneski, *Towards the National Renaissance*, for overviews of the traditional positions.

⁶⁵ The term initially referred to Greeks from certain merchant families from Istanbul, so named for the district of the city in which they lived. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century this group became important in both the Church and in secular roles, including as governors of certain Ottoman provinces—notably Wallachia and Moldova. The Porte acquiesced in the rise of the Phanariots given the considerable revenue offered by the sale of positions in the Orthodox hierarchy, essentially a form of indirect tax farming.

the corresponding rise of corruption in obtaining positions in the hierarchy meant an increased tax burden on Orthodox laity. To recuperate the costs of the significant bribes required to initially secure positions, Orthodox clergy increased tithes and fees. By the 1820s Church tithes for Bulgarian peasants had risen up to twice the level of Ottoman taxation.⁶⁶ A series of protests erupted sporadically throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, stretching across the Slav-inhabited *vilayets* of the Empire and including Pirin. Initially these were against the imposition of high fees by corrupt (Greek) bishops, but by the 1840s had come to be phrased as protests against the placement of *ethnically* Greek bishops in Bulgarian-inhabited dioceses.

By the 1830s the monk Neofit Bozveli of Hilendar characterized Greeks as the enemies of the Empire's Slav inhabitants.⁶⁷ An active reform movement sought to obtain specific "rights" within the Orthodox Church, including the re-adoption of a Slav liturgy for churches with an ethnically Slav congregation. Such reformers succeeded in obtaining a *firman* in 1849 to open an Orthodox church in Constantinople owned by the "Bulgarian nation." The possibility had emerged for the leaders of the National Awakening of securing a *Bulgarian* Orthodox Church through the Sublime Porte. Recent recognition of an Armenian Orthodox *millet* and Protestant Christian *millet* within the Empire demonstrated the willingness of the Ottoman government to reform the existing millet system. Considerable internal opposition existed. Much of the Bulgarian clergy might oppose Greek dominance of the Church but preferred to hope for internal reform

⁶⁶ Crampton, 10.

⁶⁷ Meininger, *Formation*, 75.

— a faction that included two of the existing four self-professed ethnically Bulgarian bishops created by the Patriarch, as well as the head of Rila Monastery.⁶⁸

The Patriarchate's refusal to allow further reforms, however, led to an open breach between the Patriarch and a growing number of the Slav-inhabited diocese in 1860. By the end of the decade, several Greek bishops had been forcibly removed from their sees by their flocks. In 1870 the Porte recognized that these divisions could not be easily overcome. Accordingly, overriding the objections of the Orthodox Church, the Porte issued a *firman* in 1870 recognizing a Bulgarian Exarchate Church. The Exarchate would remain affiliated (and nominally subservient) to the existing Patriarchate. But the *firman* proposed to grant it authority over seventeen dioceses (subsequently reduced to fifteen). Chiefly located in the two Bulgarian *vilayets* of Tuna and Rumelia, the proposed transfer would have included Ruse, Silistra, Shumen, Turnovo, Sofia, Vratsa, Lovech, Vidin, Nish, Pirot, Kiustendil, Samokov, Veles (in the *vilayet* of Kosovo), plus the non-municipal parts of Varna, Sliven, Sozopol and Plovdiv.⁶⁹ Antim I was designated as the Exarch in March 1872, and promptly declared independence from the Orthodox Church of the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Patriarchate in turn declared the Exarchate schismatic and broke ties.⁷⁰ Pirin was, however, excluded from the territory of the new Exarchate Church — as

⁶⁸ Crampton, 13.

⁶⁹ "Firman za suzdavane na Bulgarska ekzarhiia," February 28, 1870 [Julian] in Kosev, 253

⁷⁰ Meininger, *Formation*, 187-189.

Veles was one of the dioceses not transferred, no Macedonian territory would be initially included.

The *firman* allowed for an additional compromise. If two-thirds of the Orthodox Christians in a diocese wished to move from the Patriarchate to the Exarchate, the Sublime Porte would grant the transfer.⁷¹ Pirin, directly adjacent to the new Exarchate diocese in Kiustendil, would see early and consistent attempts by the new Bulgarian church to spread its influence, complementing the existing efforts of the National Awakening.

The Bulgarian Awakening and the Exarchate in Pirin

Pirin was part of a broad borderland between predominantly-Slav and predominantly-Greek inhabited territories, and the threat of Hellenization was well-recognized locally. But local elites also recognized the dilemma of how local inhabitants were — or should be — distinguished from a Bulgarian movement that was in some ways “foreign” to local inhabitants, being centered on the eastern regions of Bulgaria.⁷² For the Slav population of Ottoman Macedonia, the Bulgarian national movement was both inclusive *and* exclusive. Inclusive, in that local intellectuals took part in this broader Bulgarian cultural renaissance. And yet, of the 191 individuals that Thomas Meininger records as the “elite” members of an emerging “Bulgarian intelligentsia” over the 1840s to 1870s, only six were from Vardar Macedonia, four from Aegean Macedonia, and nine from Western

⁷¹ “Firman za suzdavane na Bulgarska ekzariia,” 254.

⁷² Victor Friedman, “Macedonian Language and Nationalism during the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Balkanistica* 2 (1975), 84.

Bulgarian regions (including Pirin Macedonia).⁷³ The National Awakening drew disproportionately from eastern Bulgaria in defining a Bulgarian national consciousness and creating a codified vernacular language. The result was a sporadic and uneven emphasis, in both geographic Macedonia and in western Bulgaria, on encouraging local dialect and cultural expression. In the 1860s, for example, writers originating from western Bulgaria championed a rival literary language based on western dialects.

Although few hailing from Ottoman Macedonia were included among this “cultural elite,” the expansion of schools in the region resulted in the healthy growth of a local educated elite. Of the leaders of the late-nineteenth century national movement in Macedonia, about 80 percent were native to the region (the rest generally hailing from Eastern Rumelia), predominantly from towns in the Monastir *vilayet*.⁷⁴ Pirin was unusual within Ottoman Macedonia since over 80 percent of the local leaders of the national movement in the Seres *sanjak* were born in villages.⁷⁵ As in central and northern Bulgaria, schools were opened and extended in the Macedonian lands beginning in the 1840s, as noted in Table 3.⁷⁶ By 1876, there were a total of 55 Slavic-language schools in the Pirin *kazas*, with

⁷³ Meininger, 123.

⁷⁴ This was due to the better conditions in the Monastir *vilayet*, where Slavic-language schools and churches were established more rapidly than in the Selânik *vilayet*. See Iordan Vanchev, *Novobulgarskata prosveta v Makedonija prez Vuzrazhdaneto (do 1878 godina)* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1982), 101.

⁷⁵ Adanir, 175.

⁷⁶ Among the earliest was the opening of five schools in Veles, in the Monastir *vilayet*. See “Dopiska ot Veles,” October 28, 1850 [Julian], originally in *Tsarigradski Vestnik*, in Kosev, 149-150; see also “Pismo na Dimitur Miladinov,” in Kosev, 151. Note that Bulgaria only switched to the Gregorian calendar in 1916; dates in original documents given in the Julian calendar are marked [Julian].

62 teachers and 2,575 registered students. Notably, these schools were concentrated in the two eastern *kazas*, which possessed 33 of these schools, 46 of the teachers and 1,735 of the students.⁷⁷

Table 3:
Church and School Construction in Pirin Towns⁷⁸

	<i>Church Construction</i>	<i>School construction</i>
Bansko	1804, 1835, 1862	1857
Gorna Dzhumaia	1840-44, 1860	1844, 1850, 1854, 1863
Melnik	1756, 1846, 1869	1872
Nevrokop	1811, 1865	1847, 1853, 1862
Petrich	1857, 1868	1873
Razlog	1834	1858, 1870

By the turn of the century in the combined Seres *sanjak* there were 184 Bulgarian schools (with a recorded 7,718 students), and an additional 122 Bulgarian schools (7,621 students) in the other *sanjaks* of the Selânik *vilayet*. This fell well short of the larger number of Greek schools with a recorded 34,044 students in the *vilayet* as a whole.⁷⁹ Greek-language education continued to predominate not only among ethnic Greeks, but among a considerable number of the local Slav population.

The Greek schools highlight the divisive nature of the Awakening in Pirin. Slavs were a minority in the ethnically-diverse towns of Pirin. Most of the towns in

⁷⁷ These figures are adapted from those in Vanchev, 89-90. Compared to the figures as given for the Seres *sanjak* as a whole, the schools in the Nevrokop *kaza* alone accounted for over a quarter of schools, professors and pupils in the *sanjak*.

⁷⁸ Based on Gavrilova, 60-63, 163-169.

⁷⁹ Ipek Yosmaoğlu-Turner provides a thorough discussion of national schools in the Selânik *vilayet*: see Ipek Yosmaoğlu-Turner, *The Priest's Robe and the Rebel's Rifle: Communal conflict and the Construction of National Identity in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908* (unpublished Phd Dissertation: Princeton, 2005), 210-213.

the region lacked an urban and prosperous class of *chorbadzhia* to support education in either local dialects or in literary Bulgarian, Razlog and Bansko being significant exceptions but small in size. Greek Orthodox hierarchy, both at the local level and among their superiors in the provincial centers of Seres and Salonika, opposed the opening of such schools and reading rooms.⁸⁰ In the 1860s, for example, the opening of a new Bulgarian-language school in Nevrokop met with the open opposition of local Greek clergy and community figures.⁸¹ Such conflict spurred the increased use of local dialects in education and religion.⁸² Unlike more prosperous parts of Ottoman Macedonia, however, the Pirin *kazas* generally required support and assistance in founding schools and churches. Such aid was forthcoming from the prosperous upland central Bulgarian towns and merchant colonies, but these areas favored an emerging eastern dialect of Bulgarian. The resulting dilemma was whether to insist upon local vernacular in education and religious life, or to accept the influence of the coalescing Bulgarian literary language.⁸³

Inter-ethnic divisions were one problem; but the *Vuzrazhdane* posed *intra*-ethnic divisions as well. The Awakening increasingly championed a codified, literary Bulgarian language in place of existing dialects, and one that served to

⁸⁰ For an overview, see Katarjiev, 160-166; 201-207.

⁸¹ "Dopiska ot Nevrokop," June 18, 1864, original in *Svetnik*, July 4, 1864, in Kosev, 208-209; for the Seres *sanjak*, see also "Dopiska ot Seres," March 17, 1870, *Makedoniia*, in Kosev, 256-258; Katarjiev, 177-185.

⁸² Horace Lunt, "A Survey of Macedonian Literature," *Harvard Slav Studies* 1:3 (1953), 367.

⁸³ Compare, for example, the extent of local support in Bitola and the need for external support in Nevrokop; see "Dopiska ot Bitolya," December 7, 1865, *Turtsia* Jan 8, 1866 in Kosev, 217 and "Dopiska ot Nevrokop," June 20, 1865, original in *Turtsia*, July 10, 1865 [all dates in Julian], in Kosev, 215.

exclude local language by stressing eastern dialectical forms over those typical of western Bulgaria. Moreover, the emergence of the Exarchate and its relations with the Bulgarian state after 1878 led to more widespread attempts to encourage a Bulgarian national consciousness after independence.⁸⁴ Local educated elites in Pirin and across Macedonia accordingly challenged the direction of the new Bulgarian literary language. Such “localist” feelings were a common feature of the Awakening, as many localities (in the Bulgarian lands as well as in Macedonia) sought to preserve local particularities of speech.⁸⁵

What set the western dialects apart was a more active challenge to the emerging literary language. Some, such as the Mladinov brothers in the 1850s, encouraged a Bulgarian literary language that would draw upon both eastern and western dialects. Others, such as Krste Missirkov (albeit inconsistently) championed a separate Macedonian language.⁸⁶ Such efforts would see the publishing of several grammatical textbooks based on Macedonian dialects in the 1850s and 1860s.⁸⁷ The issue was significant enough to result in active desires

⁸⁴ On the role of the church in fostering Bulgarian national consciousness in Pirin, see Konstanin Pandev, “Narodnostna deinost na bulgarskata ekzarkhiia (1878-1902 g.,” *Istoricheski Pregled* 41:1 (1986).

⁸⁵ Dimitur Tsanev, “Natsionalnoobrazovatelniat protses i etnoreligioznoto suznanie na bulgarite prez Vuzrazhdaneto,” Petur Angelov, et. al., ed., *Stranitsi ot bulgarskata istoriia: Subitii, Rzmisli, Lichnosti* (Sofia: Prosveta, 1993), 80.

⁸⁶ See Krste P. Missirkov, *On Macedonian Matters* (Skopje: Grafichki zavod Gotse Delchev, 1974). What is less appreciated in Macedonian historiography, which traces the movement for the contemporary codified Macedonian language through Missirkov, is that he later rejected such plans as an émigré in Bulgaria.

⁸⁷ Victor Friedman, “The Modern Macedonian Standard Language and its Relation to Modern Macedonian Identity” in Victor Roudometof, ed., *The Macedonian Question: Culture, Historiography, Politics* (Boulder: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 2000), 171-179. For additional introductions to the Macedonian position on historical precedents to the modern

for autonomy *from* the emerging Bulgarian literary language. In the Pirin town of Bansko for example, there were open protests in the 1880s that school textbooks were in the literary language rather than western dialects.⁸⁸ Slavic-speaking Orthodox Church officials from the region made similar protests that decade against the use of vernacular Bulgarian rather than local dialect in administrative duties.⁸⁹ A small but active “Macedonian movement” arose which actively opposed some aspects of a Bulgarian Awakening and encouraged local literary expression defined in opposition to Bulgarian styles.⁹⁰

The potential conflict between “local” and “external” factions in the Awakening was complicated by the fact that educated elites originating in Macedonia often traveled abroad for education and then remained there, in part because job opportunities in Macedonia remained limited. Debates over Pirin’s

Macedonian language, see Lunt, 363-396; Friedman, “Macedonian Language,” 83-98; Koneski, *National Renaissance*; Blazhe Koneski, *Istorija na makedonskiot jazik* (Skopje: Kultura, 1967); a critical but superficial response is James Clarke, “Macedonia from SS Cyril and Methodius to Horace Lunt and Blaž Koneski: Language and Nationality,” in Dennis P. Hupchick, ed., *The Pen and the Sword: Studies in Bulgarian History by James F. Clarke* (Boulder: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1988), 162-168.

⁸⁸ Victor Friedman, “The Modern Macedonian Standard Language,” 182; see also Katarjiev, 215-216.

⁸⁹ Vlado Popovski, *Makedonskoto Nacionalno-Osloboditelno Dvizhenje do TMRO: Socijalno Politichko Dvizhenje*, (Skopje: Makedonska Kniga, 1989), p 19, cf 39. The Slavic rite used archaic Old Church Slavonic, but this left the question of which language to use in “day-to-day” administrative tasks and interaction with one’s flock.

⁹⁰ See, for example, the letter of Petko Slaevikov dated February 1874, in University of Ss. Kiril and Metodij, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History and Institute for National History, *Documents of the Macedonian People for Independence and a Nation-State*, Vol 1, Hristo Andonov-Poljanski, ed. (Skopje: Kultura, Makedonska Kniiga, Medunarodna Politika & Misla, 1985), 237-242; see also Blaze Ristovski, *Makedonskiot narod i makedonskata nacija* (Skopje: Misla, 1983), 175-180.

role in a Bulgarian nation often took place between individuals residing in Bulgaria, particularly after 1878; increasingly, the cultural movement of the Awakening was equated with a *political* movement. The Macedonian émigré population in Bulgaria began to play a key role in promoting an inclusive concept of Macedonia *within* Bulgarian political and cultural circles. Forty-three Macedonian émigré associations were founded within Bulgaria, nearly all of which addressed the question of Macedonian liberation from Ottoman rule in some form.⁹¹ Macedonians were greatly overrepresented in certain circles; not only did over a quarter of Sofia's population by 1900 originate from Macedonia, but so did 33 percent of military officers, 43 percent of government civil servants, and 37 percent of ordained priests.⁹² This disproportionately large group composed a forceful and vocal presence within Bulgaria, generally advocating the liberation and inclusion of Ottoman Macedonia into a greater Bulgaria. The question, thus, became one of whether or not Macedonia would be "incorporated" into a centralizing Bulgarian identity, or whether or not distinct Macedonian elements would be incorporated into a broader concept of "Bulgarianness." To existing divisive tensions within Pirin, as for Macedonia in general, were added potential rivalries between local elites in Pirin and elites among its corresponding émigré community in Bulgaria. These rivalries would emerge, already in the later nineteenth century, into open conflict between local

⁹¹ Perry, *Politics of Terror*, 172.

⁹² These percentages are based on figures given in Perry, *Politics of Terror*, 35-36.

and émigré partisans of separate paramilitary movements, as discussed in Chapter Three.

The creation of the Exarchate began the transformation of the *Vuzrazhdane* in Macedonia from an locally-oriented and autonomous “national movement” to one that was increasingly centrally-directed, first from Istanbul by the Exarchate, later from Sofia. School and church construction in the 1840s and 1850s had generally been at the behest of local elites. This changed when the *firman* of 1870 held out the apparent promise by the Porte of the creation of a Bulgarian Orthodox *millet* within the Empire. As such, while the local use of Slav dialects in education and Old Church Slavonic as a liturgical language continued to reflect the Awakening as a cultural movement,⁹³ they also provided potential support for future *political* claims to administration over Macedonia. Increasingly, local and “foreign” Bulgarian intelligentsia sought to use the church as part of a “battle for national sovereignty.”⁹⁴ In Pirin, the turn to the Exarchate Church and increased acceptance of Bulgarian-language schooling was part of a local contest for control of the district by local Christian Slav inhabitants in the face of dominant Greek and Turkish interests in the towns. The Church itself, backed by the Bulgarian state after 1878, sought to extend its influence to incorporate the region into its own sphere of control.

⁹³ For example, “Dopiska ot Bitolsko,” July 1, 1863, original in *Gayda*, Constantinople, August 10, 1863 [Julian], in Kosev, 200-202.

⁹⁴ Yosmaoğlu-Turner, 205. These boundaries could be and were crossed over, however. Some educated elites in Pirin favored the creation of a Bulgarian church and supported its creation in 1870. See Zina Markova, “Tsurkovnonatsionalno dvizhenie v iztochna Makedoniia prez 70-te godini na XIX V,” *Istoricheski Pregled* 41:3 (1985), 18.

The decades following 1878 accordingly witnessed a conflict between competing Exarchist and Patriarchist claims to churches in the Macedonian *vilayets*, as local Orthodox populations were encouraged to take up the church issue as part of local disputes. In the 1870s, for example, the *kazas* of Nevrokop and (Greek-dominated) Melnik were split over the desire of local churches to join — or exclude — the Exarchate.⁹⁵ In 1878 in reaction to the creation of an independent Bulgaria, the Patriarchate Metropolitan of Melnik was created to restore Patriarchal and Greek influence over local churches and schools and claimed spiritual leadership over the whole of Pirin.⁹⁶ Although such conflicts were often based on ethnic lines, a considerable number of Slavs remained within or reverted to the Patriarchate despite calls for Bulgarian national unity.⁹⁷ Such struggles were often bitter at the local level, given that most villages possessed only a single church, and both the Exarchate and Patriarchate preferred to deny the use of churches under their control for use in rival rites. The local Patriarchate hierarchy almost immediately resisted calls within Pirin for the building of Slavic-rite churches. In response, local Slav elites called for elections to transfer Pirin's dioceses to the Exarchate Church.⁹⁸

The emergence of Bulgaria as an independent state in 1878 complicated such local conflicts, as did a shift by Ottoman authorities to favor the Patriarchate

⁹⁵ "Pismo ot Stefan Verkovich," Nov 12, 1872 in Kosev, 275-276.

⁹⁶ Sharkov, 138. Although the Razlog and Gorna Dzhumaia *kazas* were initially excluded, the Metropolitan subsequently and successfully lobbied to have them included under his authority. The Nevrokop *kaza* was placed under the Patriarchate Metropolitan of Drama.

⁹⁷ See Yosmaoğlu-Turner, 147-205.

⁹⁸ Markova, 19, 23-24.

against the Bulgarian Exarchate. Conflict intensified in 1890, when Skopje and Ohrid were both formally transferred to the Exarchate. The Patriarch ordered existing clergy to stop performing services in these dioceses and extended the order to other dioceses — including those within Pirin (and the *sanjak* of Seres as a whole). Churches were reopened in Pirin only when the Metropolitan in Melnik guaranteed that local churches would not use a “Bulgarian rite.”⁹⁹ Such local conflicts were exacerbated when Nevrokop (in Pirin) and Veles (in the Kosovo *vilayet*, or Vardar Macedonia) were transferred to the Exarchate in 1894 and Monastir, Strumitsa and Debar in 1898.¹⁰⁰ By the end of the century, the conflict over the Church had resulted in active ethnic tensions, even sporadic physical violence between ethnic Greeks and Bulgarians.¹⁰¹

Culture, Religion and Politics

For the *chorbadzhiiia*, the basis of their power lay in some degree of compliance with the Ottoman market and, thence, the Ottoman authorities. While this group was crucial in supporting and funding the early National Awakening, defining the movement along political lines was problematic in threatening the *status quo* (and thus the socio-economic position of the *chorbadzhiiia*).¹⁰² It accordingly remained a cultural movement until the latter nineteenth century, when new educated elite produced by the schools of the National Awakening

⁹⁹ Yosmaoğlu-Turner, 156.

¹⁰⁰ J M. Wagstaff, *Greece: Ethnicity and Sovereignty, 1820-1994: Atlas and Documents* (London: Archive Editions Limited, 2002), 21.

¹⁰¹ Yosmaoğlu-Turner, 157-158; 169.

¹⁰² For a recent and revisionist approach to the *chorbazhiiia*, see Milen Petrov, *Tanzimat for the Countryside: Midhat Pasha and the Vilayet of Danube, 1864-1868* (unpublished Princeton: PhD dissertation, 2003).

assumed leadership over the Awakening. This group comprised the core of a new nationalist movement who rejected an Ottoman state that they saw as outmoded and foreign. They sought instead to create a new Bulgarian state and national discourse, and succeeded in 1878 with the successful creation of an autonomous state. Failing to incorporate the furthest possible borders defining a Bulgarian nation — the boundaries of the Treaty of San Stefano — Bulgarian cultural elites consistently sought to spread the Awakening beyond these new borders and incorporate the “lost lands.” Local elites in turn accepted and supported the Awakening for their own purposes.

Until the 1890s, these two groups were broadly willing to cooperate together in a “cultural awakening” within Pirin. So, do, did their rivals in the Patriarchist Orthodox Church. While disputes did emerge between ethnic groups, they were rarely violent and Pirin saw little ethnic conflict.¹⁰³ This quiet was shattered in the 1890s, when a new generation of educated youth emerged, frustrated with the limited social progress available to them in the region, and with their own potential prospects for advancement.¹⁰⁴ The result was a decisive shift away from the cultural and religious focus of the *Vuzrazhdane* — and a turn to politics, and to paramilitary violence.

¹⁰³ Krustio Manchev, *Istoriia na balkanskite narodi*, XIX-XX V. (Sofia: Akeademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov,” 1999), 89.

¹⁰⁴ Adanir, 177-78.

Chapter Three:

Paramilitary Mobilization: The Macedonian Revolutionary Organizations, 1893-1912

“Great nations build from the bones of the dead;
With mud and straw, blood and sweat.”

— David Mustaine¹

On August 15, 1903, a revolt against the Ottoman Empire erupted within the *vilayet* of Monastir.² Within four days, open conflict between local guerillas and Ottoman forces spread to the *vilayets* of Salonika and Edirne (Adrianople).³

The rebels proclaimed that:

Finally the long expected day of settling our account with our age-old enemy has come. ... The appointed day on which the people throughout Macedonia and Odrin will face openly, with arms in hand the enemy...⁴

¹David Mustaine and David Ellefson, “Architecture of Aggression,” *Countdown to Extinction*, Capitol, 1992.

² The Bulgarian Exarchate Church and government only switched from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1916; on the Bulgarian calendar, the Ilinden Uprising took place on August 2, and the parallel Preobrazhenie uprising in August 6. The names derive from the holidays they fell on: St. Elijah’s Day (Ilinden, in Bulgarian), and the Feast of the Resurrection (Preobrazhenie). Bulgarian historiography emphasizes the term “Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising” to stress a Bulgarian national character to events otherwise geographically-dispersed. Macedonian historiography conversely exclusively uses the term “Ilinden Uprising,” casting the revolt as a local and distinct event.

³ Given the large Turkish garrison stationed in the *vilayet* of Kosovo and the limited support for the uprising (chiefly in the Skopje *sanjak*), the revolutionaries had previously decided not to attempt a simultaneous revolt there as well.

⁴ “Vuzvanie na glavniiia shtab v Bitolskiiia revoliutsionen okrug, s koeto se provuzglasjava Ilindenskoto vustanie,” July 15, 1903 [Julian], in Dimitur Kosev, Hristo Hristov, Nikolai Todorov and Valentin Stankov, eds., *Makedoniiia: Sbornik ot dokumenti i materiali* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata akademiiia na naukite), 461-462.

The stated goal was to achieve autonomy and local government for the entire population of the Macedonian *vilayets*, but the expected popular uprising failed to materialize. According to the records of the revolutionaries, over 26,000 guerillas took part in the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising, the majority (nearly 20,000) in the Monastir *vilayet*.⁵ These considerable numbers were chiefly drawn from the two major Slav paramilitary organizations present in the region.⁶

In the subsequent fighting, the rebels dynamited railways, rail depots, telephone and telegraph lines and bridges. Rebel *cheti* (armed bands) engaged local Ottoman army detachments. Although the rebels proclaimed that the Uprising was on behalf of all peoples living in Macedonia, *cheti* also attacked Muslim civilians, with thousands fleeing from areas of fighting. In several Slav-inhabited areas, such as the Giavato *nahiye* (in the *sanjak* of Monastir) and Demir Hisar *nahiye* (in the *sanjak* of Ohrid), the rebels were able to seize local garrisons, eject Ottoman troops and declare an end to Ottoman rule. The most renowned success was the Krushevo Republic, which declared outright independence and for ten days functioned as its own local government.⁷ Within

⁵ Bulgarian historiography emphasizes the term “Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising,” which highlights the simultaneous uprisings in Macedonia and Thrace. Macedonian historiography prefers “Ilinden Uprising,” which emphasizes a distinctly Macedonian event. Here, I use the former to refer to the combined uprising, and the latter to refer to only that part of the uprising fought in Macedonia.

⁶ Duncan Perry, *The Politics of Terror* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), 139. There remains some disagreement over precise figures; 26,500 is given for total participation by Todor Petrov, *Nelegalnata armia na VMORO v Makedonija i Odrinsko, 1899-1908* (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 2002), 76.

⁷ For Krushevo, see Ljuben Lape, “the Krushevo republic,” *Macedonian Review* 3:1 (1973). The Krushevo Republic symbolizes the Ilinden Uprising in both Bulgarian and particularly Macedonian historiography, despite the fact that the

Pirin, fighting broke out across all five of the *kazas*, but most intensely in the east with its predominantly Slav rural and urban population. To the south of Nevrokop, telegraph lines were cut and the rebels attacked the Ottoman garrisons in the villages of Obidim and Kremen. The Razlog *kaza* was the scene of particularly intense fighting, with nearly a dozen villages declaring for the Uprising.⁸

Within weeks however, Ottoman authorities regained control over the province. The rebels fought 239 separate engagements with Ottoman regular troops and provincial militia but were increasingly hampered by the 70,000 refugees (often including neighbors and families) who clogged the roads and required protection from Ottoman irregulars, who now sought retribution for earlier attacks against Muslim civilians.⁹ Tens of thousands were displaced when Ottoman militia and irregular forces unleashed reprisals directly on villages suspected of aiding the rebels: crops and livestock were requisitioned, houses and other structures burned.¹⁰ Thirty thousand fled to Bulgaria in the weeks after

uprising in the village of Klisura was actually more successful, staying in rebel hands for some three weeks: Lape, 25. For an analysis of Krushevo's symbolic importance, see Keith Brown, *The Past in Question* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 181-210.

⁸ Kostadin Paleshutski, "Ilindensko-Preobrazhenskoto vustanie v serskiia revoliutsionen okrug," *Istoricheski Pregled* 39:3 (1983), 3-13; Veselin Hadzhinikolov, Konstantin Pandev, Iordan Shopov, Georgi Dimitrov, Kostadin Paleshutski, Krum Vodenicharov, Liubomir Panaiotov, Stoian Germanov and Petur Galchin, eds., *Istoriia na Blagoevgradskata okruzhna organizatsiia na BKP* (Sofia: Partizdat, 1979), 31; Petrov, 65; Ivan Katarjiev, *Borba do pobeda* (Skopje: Misla, 1983), 575-594.

⁹ Perry, *ibid*, 135, 137; Fikret Adanir, *Die Makedonische Frage: Ihre Entstehung und Entwicklung bis 1908* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner Verlag, 1979), 179-199.

¹⁰ Krste Bitoski, "The Course of the Ilinden Uprising," in Borish Vishinski, ed., *The Epic of Ilinden* (Skopje: Macedonian review Editions, 1973), 103; see also "Pismo no 534 na glavniiia shtab na vtori makedono-odrinski revoliutsionen okrug do bulgarskoto pravitelstvo vuv vruzka s polozhenieto na vustanaloto naselenie I

the Uprising began. By the end of September, when both fighting and reprisals tapered off, in Pirin alone the losses by local Slav inhabitants included 1,090 houses burned, 290 killed, 50 incidents of rape reported, and 5,772 left as refugees.¹¹ In the Razlog *kaza*, where the fighting in Pirin had reached its highest intensity, the villages of Belitsa, Odibim, Kremen, Mehomia and Bachevo were completely destroyed.¹²

In less than a generation, what had been a movement encouraging a generally cultural mobilization had been superceded by new, revolutionary organizations that sought to mobilize militarily the Macedonian *vilayets* and overthrow Ottoman rule within them. This was to be a new, transformative phase in the formation of national consciousness, still short of the further phase of state-building already present in Bulgaria as well as Serbia, Greece and Romania. The existing tensions between locally- and externally-directed national mobilizations in Pirin would culminate with the creation of rival paramilitary movements and the beginning of outright guerilla warfare with Ottoman authorities — as well as between and within these paramilitary organizations.

The Forge of Guerilla Resistance

The concept of a “common struggle” is a standard device in nationalist rhetoric. The French Revolution set the pattern by labeling inter-state conflicts as

iskane na pomosht ot strana na Bulgariia,” September 9, 1903 [Julian] in Kosev, 489-495.

¹¹ Katarjiev, 593. Figures for Muslim victims in the fighting are not given in Macedonia or Bulgarian histories of the Uprising.

¹² ‘Deklaratsiia na bezhantsite ot Razlozhko do okoliiskiia upravitel v Samokov po povod pokanata da se vurnat v rodnite si mesta,’ September 28, 1903 [Julian] in Kosev, 496.

national conflicts and using the army as a vehicle for promoting not just a revolutionary but also a national consciousness.¹³ Conflict itself can serve as an integrative vehicle for an *ethnie*, encouraging a “military mobilization” that unites all members in the service of the war. Warfare serves as a rallying point for national consciousness in creating a duality of “us” and “the other” (e.g., “the enemy”), a duality that can bolster the “us” and “the other” of national consciousness.¹⁴ This underlies Anthony Smith’s attention to the nationalizing capacity of “military mobilization” as outlined in Chapter One. From 1893-1912 the practical and symbolic role of paramilitary organizations defining themselves variably as Bulgarian in national terms or Macedonian in geographic terms served as a vehicle to spread national consciousness in Pirin.¹⁵

Yet it also served as a point of conflict between proponents of centralization and autonomy. Military conflict by the nineteenth century had largely become a “monopoly of violence” that reserved armed force to the sole purview of the central state. It could thus be legitimately employed only by a central state authority as opposed to medieval and early modern “intra-state”

¹³ Charles Tilly, “The Emergence of Citizenship in France and Elsewhere,” in *International Review of Social History: Supplement 3, Citizenship, Identity and Social History* 40 (1995), 229.

¹⁴ See Gerald F. Linderman, *The World Within War: The American Experience in World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), particularly pages 263-344; David Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Back Bay Books: 1996), 149-155.

¹⁵ For an introduction to focused studies, see Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986), 157-161; idem., “War and Ethnicity: the Role of Warfare in the Formation, Self-images and Cohesion of Ethnic Communities,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 4:2 (October 1981), 375-397; for a broad perspective on the impact of nationalism on conflict, see Barry Posen, “Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power,” *International Security* 18:2 (1993), 80-124.

conflicts waged or organized by members of the aristocracy, towns, religious confessions or by mercenaries.¹⁶ The “national” aspect of conflict was thus increasingly affiliated with a state, and this correlation began to emerge in Macedonia as well. Macedonian paramilitary forces were defended as protecting the local ethnic Bulgarian population against first an Ottoman threat, later against rival ethnic Greek and Serbian guerillas. The rebels justified the Ilinden Uprising as *creating* a Macedonian state, though the ultimate form — independent, united with Bulgaria or remaining autonomous in the Ottoman Empire remained unclear and controversial, as is discussed below.

Historians have argued that demands to unify “state” with “nation” in post-eighteenth century Europe thus recast warfare and conflict along *national* terms. The creation of a modern military, as noted in Chapter One, could serve as a vehicle for cultural assimilation and nation-reification by creating or reinforcing national consciousness among the male population through universal conscription.¹⁷ Similarly, the experience itself of conflict, both on and off the battlefield, has been suggested as crucial in the creation of both actual experiences and in symbolic narratives that define identity.¹⁸ France’s

¹⁶ See Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, 990-1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Charles Tilly, “States and Nationalism in Europe 1492-1992,” *Theory and Society* 23:1 (February 1994), 131-146; and William McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

¹⁷ Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 292-302.

¹⁸ For accounts of the role war plays in the shaping of identity, see Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: the Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 11-82; and

revolutionary experience of the “nation at arms” represented the conflation between the nation and the state in wartime, and the role of warfare in solidifying the concept of the “nation.” This would deepen further in the twentieth century, when the logic of total war expanded to include the entirety of the nation’s economic resources and every factory worker and farmer ultimately served to drive the wartime economy. The entire population of the state would thus be drawn upon in the pursuit of the state’s wars, creating a sense of national equality and unity.

The rise of paramilitary violence in Pirin, however, drew more on bandit traditions than on a modern *l’eveé en masse*. The distinction between early modern and modern warfare was less sharp in Southeastern Europe. The fight of *cheti* (armed bands) against the Ottoman Empire was in many ways an extension of the *haiduk* (bandit) tradition, in which the experience of combat was local and personal, “autonomous” from the emerging modern state structures in Southeastern Europe.¹⁹ As such, the paramilitary mobilization of 1893-1912 was as much a divisive experience as an integrative one. The forces of the Bulgarian state would not fight in this Macedonian struggle. Instead, independent armed groups predominated with certain groups receiving sporadic support by the government in Sofia, as detailed below.

Avner Ben-Amos, “War Commemoration and the Formation of Israeli National Identity,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 31:2 (Winter 2003), 171-195.

¹⁹ The link is consciously evoked in national historiographies. See, for example, Nedelcho Dimitrov, *Pirinski Haiduti* (Blagoevgrad: Okruzhen istoricheski muzei, 1972).

While many of the local *cheti* formed in the course of this paramilitary struggle served alongside the forces of the Bulgarian state in the wars after 1912, the state did not obtain control in a simple, linear process. Émigrés from Ottoman Macedonia residing in Bulgaria were eager to harness state power to carry out revolution in the Macedonian *vilayets* — a potential “monopolization of violence” that neither *haiduti* or revolutionary leaders in the provinces necessarily welcomed. Already before the Ilinden Uprising, rivalries emerged between guerilla factions that supported inclusion into a larger, Bulgarian state — and those who favored retaining local autonomy. Over 1893-1912, the result was an active attempt by *both* factions to mobilize support within the region — and to frame this “common struggle” within a narrative of national consciousness, if yet not fully defined.

The 1890s Generation and the Politicization of the Cultural Awakening

The events of 1877-78 transformed the nature of the Bulgarian Awakening in the Macedonian lands. Russian victory in the war with the Ottoman Empire resulted in the creation of an autonomous Principality of Bulgaria — technically part of the Ottoman Empire, but effectively an independent state.²⁰ The new state encompassed only part of the “Bulgarian lands” given the opposition of rival Great Powers to the creation of a powerful Russian “client state” in Southeastern Europe. The final borders excluded extensive territories in Eastern Rumelia, Thrace and Macedonia, although Article 23 of the Treaty of Berlin specified that

²⁰ Yet one whose administration was overseen by Russian advisors for almost ten years after its foundation. I am indebted to Ilya Vinkovetsky for discussions on this subject from his currently published research.

the Ottoman Empire must provide for improved conditions and local autonomy in these respective *vilayets*.²¹ Pirin now bordered on the Principality of Bulgaria, but it was not included within the new Bulgarian state, nor was any territory from the *vilayets*.

The inhabitants of Pirin felt the effects of exclusion all the more keenly given that Russian troops briefly occupied northern Pirin during the war. They displaced Turkish rule from parts of the Gorna Dzhumaia and Razlog *kazas* and created expectations of the region's inclusion in a new state. The withdrawal to Bulgaria's Treaty of Berlin borders in 1878 sparked the short-lived Kresna and Razlog Uprisings (the former named for the rebel stronghold in the narrow gorge along the Struma River, south of Gorna Dzhumaia).²² Ottoman authorities quickly

²¹ See Richard J. Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878-1918. A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 20-24, for a summary of the diplomatic dispute. The expectation that the Macedonia *vilayets* would be speedily incorporated into the new state is highlighted by the fact that the region elected delegates to the initial Bulgarian constitutional convention in 1879. See "Pulnomoshtno na bulgari ot Makedoniia za uchastie v Uchreditelnoto subranie na Kniazhestvoto," February 13, 1879, in Kosev, 358-359.

San Stefano is generally represented in Bulgarian historiography as a defeat for a chance for "national unity," and in Macedonian historiography as an attempt at "foreign and alien [Bulgarian] rule" over Macedonia. For a Bulgarian perspective, see Elena Statelova, "Politika na Kniazhestvo Bulgaria i Iztochna Rumelia po natsionalniia vupros i dvizehnieto za obedinenie na bulgarskite zemi," in *Nationsonalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie na makedonskite i trakiiskite bulgari, 1878-1944: Tom Purvi, Borbi za zapazvane na edinstvoto na Bulgarskata natsia* (Sofia: Makedonski Nauchen institut and Institut po istori pri BAN, 1994), 90-93. For a Macedonian perspective, see Mihailo Apostolski, *Velikobugarske pretenzije od San Stefana do danas* (Beograd: Vuk Karadic, 1978); and Jovan Pavlovski and Mishel Pavlovski, *Macedonia: Yesterday and Today* (Skopje: Mi-An Publishing, 1998). My thanks to Nadja Duhaček for her assistance with the Serbian-language Apostolski text.

²² On the Kresna Uprising, see Katarjiev, *Borba do pobeda*, 7-9. On the Razlog Uprising, see See "Apel na Privremennoto bulgarsko upravlenie, izdaden na Pirin

suppressed this rare turn to violence, with many of the participants from Gorna Dzhumaia fleeing across the border and settling in the town of Dupnitsa within Bulgaria.²³ The failure of the uprising contrasted with the apparent gains of the ongoing cultural and religious mobilization which are discussed in Chapter Two, seemed to improve the lot of local inhabitants through the building of churches and schools. Armed revolt, on the other hand, resulted in thousands of local inhabitants being left homeless and fleeing across the border to the new state.²⁴

The Berlin Congress of 1878 thus recast the “Eastern Question” — what would be the fate of the Ottoman Empire? — into the “Macedonian Question,” the key Ottoman territory left in Europe. As expressed by Duncan Perry, this breaks down further into three related questions: “What territory constituted Macedonia? To what states did it belong? And of what nationality were the peoples of that land?”²⁵ For a Bulgarian state that believed its own existence answered each of these questions, the Treaty of Berlin proved far from popular. Regaining the “lost lands” of San Stefano became a *cause célèbre* for local and émigré Macedonian and Thracian groups — such as the Pirin refugees who settled in Dupnitsa —

planina, do bulgarite i slavianite da podpomognat vustanieto,” November 10, 1878 [Julian] in Kosev, 352-353.

²³ Vasil Sharkov, *Grad Gorna Dzhumaia, minalo i dnes* (Sofia: Pechatnitsa na Armeiskiia voenno-izdatelski fond, 1929), 134-136. The former Turkish inhabitants of Dupnitsa had already been displaced as refugees, some proceeding to settle in Gorna Dzhumaia.

²⁴ Kemal Karpat has further argued that the fighting in 1877-78 in Pirin helped destabilize the local ethnic order. Kemal Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 369-374.

²⁵ Perry, *Politics of terror*, 2.

and a continuing problem in Bulgarian foreign policy.²⁶ The selection of Sofia as the capital of the new state reflected the belief that Macedonia would inevitably be incorporated into an expanded state in which Sofia would then be located in the center, rather than in the far west.²⁷

International pressure (particularly on the part of Russia), however, prohibited any aggressive Bulgarian foreign policy.²⁸ Stefan Stambolov (regent from 1886-1887 and prime minister from 1887 to 1894) accordingly endorsed a gradualist approach of enhancing Bulgarian claims to Macedonia territory through continuing the existing institutions of the National Awakening: schools and the expansion of Exarchate.²⁹ Stambolov anticipated that maintaining the cultural mobilization of the Slav inhabitants of the Macedonian and Thracian *vilayets* would encourage a Bulgarian national consciousness in the region, lead to real improvements in living conditions and provide a foundation for eventual Bulgarian annexation.

²⁶ Krustio Manchev, *Istoriia na balkanskie narodi*, XIX-XX V. (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov," 1999), 90-91.

²⁷ Nearly 30 percent of the population of the capital by 1900 was composed of Macedonian-born immigrants. Nadine Lange Akhund, *The Macedonian Question, 1893-1908: From Western Sources*. (Boulder: East European Monographs, Boulder and Columbia University Press, 1998), 44.

²⁸ Aggressive Bulgarian policy with regard to Eastern Rumelia (the initial territorial priority and unified with Bulgaria in 1885), resulted in sufficient Russian pressure to force Bulgaria's first ruler, Alexander of Battenberg, to abdicate. Perry, *Stefan Stambolov*, 78-79, 85-99; Elena Statelova, *Istoriia na Nova Bulgariia, 1878-1944*. (Sofia: Izdatelska kushta Anubis, 1999), 52-88.

²⁹ See V. Tankova, "Politika na pravitelstvoto na Stefan Stambolov po natsionalniia vupros," in *Natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie na makedonskite i trakiiskite bulgari, 1878-1944: Tom Purvi, Borbi za zapazvane na edinstvoto na bulgarskata natsia* (Sofia: Makedonski Nauchen Institut and Institut po istoriia pri BAN, 1994), 221-240.

The result was a re-vitalization of the *millet* system, as confessional identities were bolstered by funding for new churches and church/run schools from sources outside the *vilayets*.³⁰ The Bulgarian state actively encouraged the use of schools and Exarchate churches to foster a Bulgarian national consciousness. This direct state intervention, of a kind previously absent, transformed the *Vuzrazhdane*. Religious affiliation was now increasingly viewed as corresponding to a national affiliation. The Exarchate Church's activities in the Macedonian *vilayets* were expanded, with state assistance.³¹ But this in turn led directly to, as Fikret Adanir calls it, a *Kirchenkampf* between the Exarchate and the Patriarchate as the churches became the proxies during the 1880s for a *political* struggle in Macedonia.³² The newly independent Bulgarian state provided material support to Exarchate churches and affiliated schools in Macedonia from this time forward.³³ Such efforts, too, did little to satisfy the demands of those who sought immediate reform in Macedonia and would increasingly turn to the potential of violent, revolutionary change. "Revolutionary

³⁰ Perry, *Politics of Terror*, 32-33; Perry, *Stefan Stambolov*, 152-53, 227-231.

³¹ Z. Markova, "Deinostta na Bulgarskata ekzariia v Makedoniia i Odrinska Trakiia," in *Nationalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie na makedonskite i trakiiskite bulgari, 1878-1944: Tom Purvi, Borbi za zapazvane na edinstvoto na Bulgarskata natsiya* (Sofia: Makedonski Nauchen institut and Institut po istori pri BAN, 1994), 116-150.

³² Adanir, 100.

³³ Increasingly, schools fell under the jurisdiction of local churches. By 1895, an *irade* of the Porte formally placed most Bulgarian-language schools under the supervision of the Exarchate, with a few church-run schools allocated to their respective Catholic and Protestant Churches. This underscores the persistence of the *millet* system in Ottoman administration, and the affiliation between schools and church. See Ipek Yosmaoglu-Turner, *The Priest's Robe and the Rebel's Rifle: Communal conflict and the Construction of National Identity in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878-1908* (Unpublished Phd Dissertation: Princeton University, 2005), 215.

nationalism” had overshadowed the role of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1876-1877, leading to direct conflict with Ottoman authorities, rebellion, and ultimately Russian intervention. This same strain of revolutionary nationalism now spread to Macedonia, where it too began to overshadow the previously dominant role of the Church.

Ottoman authorities, fearing Bulgarian expansion, now changed their position to support the Patriarchate Church as the lesser danger to continued Ottoman rule in Macedonia.³⁴ The ongoing competition resulted in the construction of hundreds of new schools and the enrollment of thousands of new students, a dramatic increase in scale from the preceding period.³⁵ By the 1890s, the *Kirchenkampf* expanded when both the Serbian and Romanian Orthodox Churches entered the fray, each encouraging the opening of schools and churches as the basis of their own respective territorial claims.³⁶ By the end of the century, the Bulgarian side enjoyed a slight advantage. The three combined Macedonian *vilayets* boasted some 781 Exarchist schools claiming 1,221 teachers and 39,973 students while the Patriarchate supervised 613 schools claiming 951 teachers and 32,476 pupils.³⁷

³⁴ Yosmaoğlu-Turner, 210-217.

³⁵ On the late, politicized role of the Exarchate-Patriarchate conflict, see Adanir, 100-116); Nadine Lange Akhund, *The Macedonian Question, 1893-1908: From Western Sources* (Boulder: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, New York, 1998), 30-35; Markova, *passim*.

³⁶ In addition, small numbers of Protestant churches and schools were opened in the *vilayets*; such churches were generally drawn along linguistic or ethnic lines. In Pirin, a small Protestant community emerged in Bansko over the 1880s.

³⁷ Perry, *Politics of Terror*, 27-28.

The Paramilitary Movements

The expansion of the Exarchate in the 1880s remained slow, however, and promised few immediate rewards. In the early 1890s, two distinct movements emerged that sought to shift away from the Exarchate's cultural expansion to direct mass military action. In place of the scattered violence of 1878 that had been sparked by immediate concerns, several new revolutionary movements emerged in the 1890s. Each, led by an educated elite, sought to mobilize Macedonia for revolution. The two largest of these movements were the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, (*Vutreshna Makedonska Revoliutsionna Organizatsiia*, or VMRO) and the Supreme Macedonian Committee (*Vurhoven Makedonski Komitet*, better known as the *Vurhovisti* or "Supremacists").³⁸

³⁸ As noted in the introduction to this study, one of the dilemmas in writing on VMRO is in a number of historiographical controversies regarding the name. During its formative years, the group changed its name several times: not until 1897 was the name of the group standardized, as the *Bulgarsko-makedonsko-odrinska revoliutsionna organizatsiia* (Bulgarian-Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization, or BMARO), changed in 1902 to *Taina Makedonsko-odrinska Revoliutsionna Organizatsiia* (Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Committee, or SMARO), then to *Vutreshna Makedonsko-odrinska Revoliutsionna Organizatsiia* (Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Committee, IMARO) then after the war to *Vutreshna Makedonska Revoliutsionna Organizatsiia* (VMRO). The actual use of terminology by members tended to be confused, with members sometimes simply referring to the group as "the Organization." As noted, this study uses "VMRO" for the sake of simplicity, following Duncan Perry's own argument for the use of MRO: see Perry, *Politics of Terror*, 41.

Similarly, the Supreme Macedonian-Adrianople Committee (*Vurhovni Makedonski-odrinski Komitet*, or VMOK) is used by some Bulgarian historians of the movement; however, the initial Thracian wing of the group split off fairly early. See Svetlozar Eldurov *Vurhovniiat Makedono-odrinski Komitet i makedonon-odrinskata organizatsiia v Bulgariia, 1895-1903* (Sofia: Ivrai, 2003) for an example of such use.

It was the cultural movement's relative success that led to its displacement by military mobilization. The expansion of schooling in the Macedonian lands created a growing educated elite among local Slav inhabitants, many receiving secondary education within the Principality of Bulgaria and thus often correspondingly sympathetic to claims to a Bulgarian national consciousness.³⁹ Smaller numbers were educated in Serbia, Russia and Western Europe. Such educated Slavs from Macedonia often emigrated (particularly to Bulgaria), but many returned to take up positions as schoolteachers in the expanding school system in the region. As a group, these teachers (as well as other professionals) were both younger and better educated than either local *chorbadzhia* or priests. Orthodox priests at the village level were, even into the interwar period, minimally educated. The young, radicalized products of local schools now turned against the existing process of the Awakening.

The “generation of the 1890s” was impatient with the pace of Ottoman reforms and with the limited socio-economic prospects offered in Macedonia. Cultural mobilization created an educated class with increased expectations that remained unfulfilled.⁴⁰ Access to education meant exposure to an existing

³⁹ Bulgarian historiography argues that the founders of VMRO were exposed to and became an extension of the Bulgarian revolutionary tradition, having learned the these ideals in Bulgaria. For example, see Tsocho Biliarski, “Za vliianieto na ideite i deloto na Vasil Levski pri suzdavaneto na revoliutsionna organizatsiya na Bulgarite v Makedoniia i Odrinssko (1893)” *Izvestiia na Durzhavnite Arkhivi* (1987: 53), 115-126.

⁴⁰ Fikret Adanir, “The Macedonians in the Ottoman Empire, 1878-1912,” in Andreas Kapeler, ed., *The Formation of National Elites: Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850-1940* (Dartmouth: New York University Press and the European Science Foundation, 1992), 170-178.

revolutionary tradition in Bulgaria, one credited with Bulgaria's independence from Ottoman rule. Ultimately, this generation turned to violence as a means to force more immediate change. VMRO was thus formed over 1893-94 by a small circle of conspirators within Ottoman Macedonia drawn from local educated elites. Of the sixteen members who attended the group's first congress in 1894, fourteen were schoolteachers,⁴¹ one was a doctor and one a photographer. All native to the region, the core leadership sought to build a broad-based organization among both the (limited) educated cadre and also among the peasantry. Several of its leading members, including Gotse Delchev (from Kukush, in the *kaza* of the same name near Salonika), drew on socialist or anarchist political philosophy, giving the movement a slightly leftist cast.⁴²

While Exarchist successes reinforced Bulgarian claims to the Macedonian lands, the slow pace of reform and minimal prospects for immediate union with Bulgaria frustrated activists living in Sofia.⁴³ The Supremacist movement accordingly emerged in 1894-1895 among Macedonian émigrés circles in the capital, including a number of Bulgarians of non-Macedonian origin sympathetic

⁴¹ Schoolteachers were particularly involved in VMRO, and the Ottomans by the turn of the century had come to consider schools "nests of bandits." Yosmaoğlu-Turner, 215; Adanir, "Macedonians in the Ottoman Empire," 177. In part, this reflects the fact that teaching in the region's numerous Slavic-language schools was one of the few careers available to young, educated men.

⁴² Perry, *Politics of Terror*, 37-39, 41-42. Marxist historiography frequently has exaggerated the "leftist" nature of the nineteenth-century VMRO. For representative examples, see Iordan Vanchev, *Apostoli na bulgarskata svoboda* (Sofia: Narodna Mladezh, 1981) and Hristo Andonov-Poljanski, "Ilinden 1903, "Macedonian Review 13:3 (1983). For Delchev's own limited engagement of socialist themes in his writing, see Liubomir Panaitov and Hristo Hrisov, eds., *Gotse Delchev: spomeni, dokumenti, materiali* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1978).

⁴³ A mass protest in 1895, for example, complained of conditions in Macedonia and of Bulgarian policy regarding them. Akhund, 44.

to the cause.⁴⁴ The movement initially drew broadly from emigrants from across geographic Macedonia and across the political spectrum, including among its wider circle Dimitur Blagoev, the Gorna Dzhumaia-born leader of the “narrow” Socialist movement.⁴⁵ Particularly important were army officers, a relationship that expanded over several years and forged close ties between the Supremacists and the Bulgarian army.⁴⁶ Bulgaria commissioned émigrés from the Macedonian *vilayets* in disproportionate numbers. Figures such as Lt. Boris Sarafov (born in Libiahovo, Melnik *kaza*) rallied to the Supremacist cause, their involvement in an illegal paramilitary organization tacitly ignored by their commanding officers. 250 local civilian organizations with a total of some 60,000 members were loosely affiliated with the Supremacists, as well as several “secret brotherhoods” among the officer corps.⁴⁷

Both VMRO and the Supremacists agreed on the necessity for an uprising against Ottoman rule in Macedonia and Eastern Thrace to secure “autonomy” within the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁸ The question of what each group meant by

⁴⁴ Eldurov *Vurhovniyat makedono-odrinski komitet*, 26; Perry, *Politics of Terror.*, 44-46, 52-53.

⁴⁵ Georgi Purvanov, *Bulgarskata sotsialdemokratsiya i Makedonskiyat vupros ot kraia na XIX vek do 1918 godina* (Sofia: Graifmaks, 1997), 28-35; Fikret Adanır, “The National Question and the Genesis and Development of Socialism in the Ottoman Empire: the Case of Macedonia,” in Mene Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher, *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1923* (London: British Academic Press, 1994), 33.

⁴⁶ Svetlozar Eldurov, *Tainite ofitserski bratstva v osvoboditelnite borbi na Makedonija I odrinsko, 1897-1912* (Sofia: Voenno Izdatelstvo, 2002), 11-16.

⁴⁷ Eldurov, *Vurhovniyat makedono-odrinski komitet*, 11.

⁴⁸ As noted above in the introduction, both movements were also interested in the question of Ottoman Thrace. This has emerged as a point of contention in Macedonian and Bulgarian historiography, the latter emphasizing Thracian activities to argue both groups were interested in broad “Bulgarian” rather than

autonomy has resulted in significant historiographical controversies over the two groups' ultimate aims, which remain unclear. The more profitable comparison lies in how VMRO and the Supremacists sought to realize their goal of reform and autonomy for Macedonia.⁴⁹ The founders of VMRO planned a popular, peasant-based “revolution” in Macedonia that would force the Ottoman government to undertake the reforms they demanded. Open combat with police or Ottoman troops was discouraged in favor of preserving the movement’s armed strength until sufficient proselytization and organization allowed for a mass revolt across the *vilayets*.⁵⁰ Accordingly, VMRO divided the three *vilayets* into “revolutionary districts,” appointing a *voivoda* (leader) for each who was nominally responsible

narrow “Macedonian” concerns. See Eldurov, *Vurhovniat makedono-odrinski komitet*, 29.

⁴⁹ Macedonian historiography generally portrays the goal of VMRO as seeking autonomy in the path to independent statehood; Bulgarian historiography argues that autonomy was, as in the case of Eastern Rumelia, to be a transition to eventual unification with Bulgaria. There is generally little attention to the likely prospect that the ultimate goals of VMRO may not have been fully considered, or may have varied within the organization. For examples of the Macedonian position, see Aleksandar Hristov, “Printsipot na avtonomna Makedonija vo programata na Vnatreshnata Makedonska Revolutionsnra Organizatsija (VMRO),” *Glasnik* 7:2 (1964), 5-26; Ivan Katarjiev, “I.M.O.R.O.:Part 2,” *Macedonian Review* 20:3 (1990), 144; and Aleksandar T. Hristov, *VMRO i Makedonskata drzhavnost (istorisko-praven osvrt)* (Skopje: Kultura, 1993), 15-47; the Bulgarian position, Petrov, 9, *Statelova Nova Bulgariia*, 173-174. See also Stephen Fischer-Galati, “The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization: Its significance in ‘Wars of National Liberation,’” *East European Quarterly*, 6:4, 454.

⁵⁰ VMRO’s theory of revolution is well articulated in a 1906 article by Hristo Matov, one of the organization’s ideologues. See Hristo Matov, “Vustanishki deistviia,” in Hristo Matov, *Makedonska revoliutsionna sistema; VMRO Suchinenia*, Tsocho Biliarski, ed., (Sofia: n.p., 2001), 148-192. VMRO’s conception of a “broad” revolution is emphasized by Macedonian historiography; see Hristo Andonov-Poljanski, “Ilinden 1903,” *Macedonian Review* 13:3 (1983), 247; Desanka Miljovska, “The Socio-Economic Conditions of the Ilinden Uprising,” in Boris Vishinski, ed., *The Epic of Ilinden* (Skopje: Macedonian review Editions, 1973), 31.

to the Central Committee. This loose structure was to be used to train local cadres and define the areas of operation for *cheti*.

The Supremacists, for their part, sought to spark sufficient immediate conflict in the region that the Great Powers would intervene.⁵¹ As such, their strategy was to arm and direct military raids into Ottoman territory, the first in 1895 by four *cheti* against Melnik. Such raids were intended to attack local authorities and notables (both Muslim and Greek). This, it was hoped, would demonstrate to the Bulgarian government the weakness of local authorities and raise the possibility of forcible military annexation. Alternatively, the Supremacists anticipated that such raids, with attendant loss of Muslim civilians, would spark Ottoman reprisals such as those of 1876 which prompted Russia to declare war on the Porte. Such reprisals would serve as a pretext for the Great Powers to intervene directly on the legal basis of the Treaty of Berlin's Article 23, and grant autonomy or outright independence to the region. Despite these differences — and rivalry — between the two groups, they overlapped in that some individuals joined both organizations. Moreover, both VMRO and the Supremacists were willing to enter into tactical alliances and agreements with the other for mutual assistance.⁵²

Both groups competed to attract a following within the three Macedonian *vilayets*. By 1900, each had secured sufficient funds both within Macedonia and

⁵¹ Perry, 47.

⁵² In terms of rivalry, see Eldurov, *Tainite ofitserski bratstva*, 128-129. Dame Gruev, one of VMRO's founders, actually welcomed the Supremacist contribution since this indicated that Macedonians were "no longer alone;" see the quotation in Akhund, 51-52.

from émigré circles in Bulgaria to recruit and arm thousands of men. These *komitadzhi* (“committee-men,” e.g., members of the organizations) were organized into *cheti*, although some bands would serve in both organizations at one time or another. Both VMRO and the Supremacists characterized themselves as Macedonian organizations and portrayed the *vilayets* as a distinctive region belonging to a specific group. Both, for example, adopted the political slogan “Macedonia for the Macedonians,” appealing to local sentiment in their drive to recruit political support and military participation by local inhabitants. Reflecting the unclear nature of national consciousness in the region, however, both VMRO and the Supremacists simultaneously emphasized ties to Bulgaria. The paramilitary organizations arguably served to militarily mobilize the Slav population into a cohesive whole, but did not concretely resolve the question of national consciousness.

Pirin was of particular importance during this period of organization. The Supremacists used the region chiefly as a target for raids against Ottoman authority from bases in Bulgaria. They also occasionally slipped *cheti* through the Pirin mountain passes for raids south and west into the heart of the Selânik and Monastir *vilayets*.⁵³ VMRO used it to as a base to smuggle weapons and other contraband from bases across the border in Rila, Kiustendil and Dupnitsa. Over time, however, VMRO recruited more heavily in the eastern, rural *kazas* of Pirin. The *kazas*' predominantly Slav population and mountainous terrain that facilitated guerilla warfare clearly bolstered support for the paramilitary

⁵³ Eldurov, *Tainite ofitserski bratstva*, 19-20.

movement. Although specific economic complaints are quite rare in the memoir literature, it is suggestive that these regions were also those least favored by arable land. The desire to claim agricultural holdings held under *chifliks* by Muslim landowners arguably played a part in this disparity as well. The émigré population from Pirin in the Bulgarian border town Dupnitsa particularly supported the paramilitary movements. By 1900, dozens of émigrés had joined either the Supremacists or VMRO, including future leaders of VMRO in Pirin such as Yane Sandanski (originally from the village of Vlahi, in the Melnik *kaza*) and Dimo Hadzhidimov (originally from the village of Gorno Brodi, in the Seres *kaza* to the south).⁵⁴

Ottoman crackdowns began in 1897 when the Empire discovered VMRO's activities in the Monastir *vilayet* following the murders of a Muslim policeman and a local prominent civilian.⁵⁵ Despite police sweeps, from 1893 to 1900 VMRO successfully expanded its presence in Pirin and across the three *vilayets* as a whole — still, while recruiting went well among the educated elite and among students, it failed to attract much peasant support.⁵⁶ The Supremacists on the other hand continued to recruit chiefly among Macedonian émigrés living in Bulgaria, particularly among those serving in the Bulgarian army. Such

⁵⁴ Yane Sanandksi, "Spomeni," in L. Miletich, ed., *Dvizhenieto otsam vardara i borbata s vurhovistit* (Sofia: Pechatnitsa "P. Glushkov," 1927), 11-12. Sandanski was a proponent of local autonomy within VMRO and an opponent of the Supremacists although he had served in the Bulgarian army over 1892-94, the usual pattern for members of the latter group.

⁵⁵ In August 1902 the Bulgarian consul in Bitola reported over 500 Bulgarians were imprisoned there by Ottoman officials. See Statelova, *Nova Bulgariia*, 172-173.

⁵⁶ Petrov, 27-43. Perry also provides a good critique of why VMRO failed to attract peasant support.

Supremacist bands often lacked direct connections to the regions in Macedonia they operated within and frequently encountered local hostility fed by a perception they were “foreign.”⁵⁷ The result was that VMRO soon established predominance in the Macedonian *vilayets*, fostering “local” *cheti* (which often still ranged over a considerable territory). The Supremacists were a force only in those territories, most prominently including Pirin, which they could easily reach with “hit-and-run” raids from their bases within Bulgaria.

For the individuals who joined either organization, the experience of being a member of a *cheta* was an integrative experience. *Cheti* often remained relatively small. One sample (consisting of 79 *cheti* operating from Kiustendil over the two years 1904-1905) suggests bands averaged between 12 to 13 members.⁵⁸ Such *cheti* usually had a core born in the same *kaza* (this averaged 44 percent in the sample examined), with a mixture of members born in towns (37 percent) and villages. A significant number of members (18.5 percent) and leaders (23.5) of these bands were Bulgarian-born as well.⁵⁹ Members were generally in their mid-20s (the youngest from the sample group was 15, the oldest 55) and unmarried. Such experience created a generation of *komitadzhii*

⁵⁷ Akhund, 48.

⁵⁸ Vasil Giozelev, Georgi Markov, Doino Doinov, Luchezar Stoianov, Plamen Tsvetkov and Stefan Andreev, eds., *Chetite na Vutreshnata makedono-odrinska revoliutsionna organizatsia: Dnevnik i snimki na chetite na VMORO, preminali prez Kiustendilskia punkt 1903-1908 g.* (Sofia: Glavno upravlenie na Arhivite pri Ministerskiia suvet, 2003), 22-62. The volume provides lists of *cheti* that passed through the Bulgarian border town of Kiustendil. The data here reflects all *cheti* that passed through in the years 1904 and 1905. This comes to 81 *cheti*, but two were of such a size (one of one individual, one of two) that they were excluded. In all, these *cheti* included 980 men.

⁵⁹ The bands with the greatest diversity, however, were usually “Bulgarian” bands composed largely of Bulgarian-born *komitadzhii*.

with the experience of service in a local *cheta* with a significant proportion of non-local members and with a mixture of professions and backgrounds. Such a process was not dissimilar to that suggested by Eugen Weber for the “nationalizing” process of state armies — yet, in this case, the “army” was usually recruited by an individual *voivoda* who was generally autonomous from a tenuous command structure.⁶⁰

Figure 6
A VMRO *Cheta*: the band of voivod Hristo Chernopeev, 1903



Personal collection of author, posterboard print c. 1920-1930.

Certainly, not all members embraced the revolutionary principles of VMRO or the *realpolitik* of the Supremacists. In the *haiduti* tradition, many members chiefly looked forward to a chance for plunder and financial gain. Yet the *cheti* also arguably served to broaden their members’ horizons. At a time when the inhabitants of the Macedonia lands were “enclosed” by Ottoman restrictions and

⁶⁰ Although VMRO did engage in efforts to centrally organize and train its *cheti*, such efforts met with mixed success — particularly given the existing *haiduti* tradition, and the fact that most *voivodi* could move to the Supremacists if they felt their autonomy threatened. On VMRO’s organization of *cheti*, see Petrov, 27-44, 117-158

travel was limited, joining a *cheta* meant the ability to strengthen relations with *komitadzhii* from one's own locality, as well as to establish new relations—with other guerillas in the band, with the *voivodi* (leaders) of the groups (often foreign educated), and with members of other bands as the two organizations expanded. VMRO in particular established these links through the creation of a “mail system” for communication between different bands, the circulation of organization newspapers, the levying of taxes on local communities, and the creation of a “shadow judicial system” that punished dissenters within VMRO and, furthermore, adjudicated civil and criminal cases in local communities.⁶¹

Despite their leaders’ preference for long-term and comprehensive planning, VMRO’s need to secure loyalty, obtain funds and outdo rival bands all played a part in forcing the Organization⁶² into a more active role. In 1900, the Gemidzhii — an anarchist group of Macedonians occasionally allied but distinct from VMRO and the Supremacists — attempted (unsuccessfully) to blow up the Ottoman Bank in Salonika by tunneling underneath and setting off dynamite.⁶³

⁶¹ Ksente Bogoev, “The Macedonian revolutionary Liberation Organization (VMRO) in the Past Hundred Years,” *Macedonian Review* 23:2-3 (1993), 118-128. Bogoev goes so far as to refer to these efforts as a “state within a state.” At the very least, they anticipated VMRO’s broader functions in Pirin in the interwar period: see Chapter Five.

⁶² This term was used sporadically by VMRO members, as was “the Inner Organization.” The latter, chiefly used to distinguish VMRO from the “Supreme Organization,” fell into disuse after the Balkan Wars.

⁶³ Perry, *ibid.*, 100. On April 28-29 1903, they would be successful in sinking the, French-owned steamship *Guadalquivir* in Salonika harbor, several cafes, the Ottoman Bank, the post office, the German school and the city’s gas supply; a bomb attack was also made on the Constantinople Express in Salonika station. See Adanir, 170-174. Such attacks were made in the hope of drawing European attention to the plight of Macedonia. For a first-hand account, see Pavel Shatev, *V Makedoniia pod robstvo* (Sofia: Bulgarski Pisatel, 1968).

The Supremacists had by this point sent *cheti* into Pirin for nearly five years, raiding as far south as Melnik.⁶⁴ By 1901, at least six *cheti* were operating in the region, and in October 1902 they attempted to usurp VMRO's dominant role. Four hundred Supremacist *komitadzhii* were sent into the Serres *sanjak* in a move timed to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Russo-Ottoman Battle of Shipka Pass of 1877. Attempting such an attack on the anniversary was calculated to win Bulgarian public support.⁶⁵ In mid-October 1902, a second operation including 18 Supremacist *cheti* with some 300-400 men fought near Gorna Dzhumaia as part of a concerted attempt to seize and hold the town, an event subsequently advertised as the Gorna Dzhumaia Uprising.⁶⁶ Ottoman authorities in the region, however, were able to mobilize some 16,000 troops in the region and force the guerillas to withdraw.

Although a failure, the Supremacist's Gorna Dzhumaia Uprising posed a direct problem for their rival, VMRO. How confrontational should the latter organization be? Having enlisted thousands of Macedonians on a platform of preparing for revolution, the Central Committee of VMRO found it difficult to restrain them. In 1902 a *cheta* in Pirin led by Hristo Chernopeev (from Strumitsa) and Yane Sandanski kidnapped Ellen Stone, an American missionary traveling in Macedonia, and held her for ransom for several months in the region of Gorna

⁶⁴ Petrov, 21.

⁶⁵ Petrov, 69-76.

⁶⁶ Perry, *ibid*, 111, 116-117; Crampton, 276.

Dzhumaia.⁶⁷ If VMRO failed to endorse and carry out such actions, it risked losing ground to the Supremacists.

The Supremacists confronted their own problems over 1902-1903. The organization had long faced domestic opponents within the Bulgarian Army, which had grown displeased with the participation of its officers in the organization. Over 1901-1902 factions in the Ministry of War including Minister Stefan Paprikov ordered officers to refrain from paramilitary activities in connection to the two Macedonian organizations.⁶⁸ In February 1903 a Bulgarian government in need of a major foreign loan responded to international pressure and began to crack down on VMRO and the Supremacists connections within Bulgaria. The police arrested members of the group, confiscated their records, and attempted to limit their funding, recruitment and the smuggling of arms across the border.⁶⁹

The Macedonian paramilitaries now faced the likelihood of a decline in relative power in the near term, dimming their hopes of any large, planned uprising. It was this fear that led them to negotiate a fragile agreement of union into a single paramilitary movement over 1902-1903 under the name of VMRO. Many within VMRO's original leadership disliked this tentative agreement with the Supremacists, whose motives were distrusted. The alliance planned a mass

⁶⁷ Atanassoff: 66-68; American treatments include Laura Beth Sherman, *Fire on the Mountains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) and Theresa Carpenter, *The Ellen Stone Affair: America's First Hostage Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

⁶⁸ Eldurov *Vurhovniyat makedono-odrinski komitet*, 42-43.

⁶⁹ Eldurov *Vurhovniyat makedono-odrinski komitet*, 47; Perry, *ibid.*, 116, 120; Crampton, 283.

uprising against the Sublime Porte despite significant opposition within VMRO's ranks, who argued that not enough preparation had been made. The combined VMRO and Supremacist leaderships saw a revolt as fulfilling their respective goals: for the former, a peasant revolution, for the latter the creation of sufficient unrest as to secure Great Power attention.

In the Wake of Ilinden

The Ilinden Uprising failed, as the introduction to this chapter makes clear. Despite the savagery of the expected reprisals against the Christian population (and earlier attacks on Muslim civilians), the anticipated foreign military intervention was not impending. The Great Powers did not involve themselves, and pressured Bulgaria to stay neutral as well. Just as important, the course of the Uprising revealed cracks in the fragile unity between the Supremacists and VMRO.⁷⁰ In Pirin, open conflict had nearly emerged over coordinating the campaign between the local *cheti* raised by Yane Sandanski and *Vurhovist* bands.⁷¹ The failure of the Bulgarian state to intervene even led members of VMRO to direct reprisals against the government in Sofia. This included the bombing of the ferry SS *Vaskapu* in which 27 people were killed.⁷²

Although the Uprising resulted in no direct military intervention, it did result in international pressure on the Ottoman Empire to fulfill the specified reforms obligated by Article 23 of the Treaty of Berlin. Austria-Hungary sought to forge a

⁷⁰ Katarjiev, 577.

⁷¹ Yane Sandanski, "Spomeni," in Konstantin Pandev, Zdravka Noneva and Veselin Traikov, eds., *Borbite v Makedonija I Odrinsko 1878-1912: Spomeni* (Sofia: Bulgarski pisatel, 1982), 356-359.

⁷² Crampton, 285.

concordat with Russia to “manage” Balkan affairs and reduce tensions between the two states. Increasing unrest after 1900 culminating in Ilinden led the government in St. Petersburg to realize the explosive potential of unrest in Macedonia. Accordingly, in October 1903 Emperor Franz Joseph and Tsar Nicholas II met at Mürzsteg, near the Habsburg capital of Vienna, to outline a new series of reforms intended to reduce tensions in the *vilayets* (and between the two empires).⁷³

The Mürzsteg reform program consisted of four major initiatives, to be overseen by a joint international military commission.⁷⁴ The first was the reorganization and retraining of the provincial *gendarmerie*, whose ranks were now opened to the Christian population. The *gendarmerie* would fall under the overall command of Italian General Emilio Degiorgis, with local detachments supervised directly by a multinational force of military officers drawn primarily from Great Britain, France, Italy, Austria-Hungary and Russia.⁷⁵ Second was the introduction of Christian “field-guards” to provide protection for local Christian populations against banditry. Third, the powers directed that the borders of the *vilayets*, *sanjaks* and *kazas* be redrawn to better reflect ethnic and confessional differences. Fourth, the *valis’* power and authority would be expanded to help promote reform at the local level. To pay for these reforms, the three *vilayets*

⁷³ Adanir, *Die Makedonische Frage*, 234-252

⁷⁴ In addition, there were three secondary goals: the appointment of international agents to the Ottoman Inspector General’s office to monitor the reforms, the restoration of Christian villages damaged during the Uprising, and the disbanding of Ottoman *redif* (militia) units and irregular forces responsible for most of the reprisal actions.

⁷⁵ For an overview, see Lange-Akhund, 155-196; also Glen Swanson, “The Ottoman Police,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 7:1/2 (1972), 255-257.

would be financially reorganized under an International Finance Commission, which was charged with overseeing local tax collection and other state revenues.⁷⁶ The region was divided into five zones and each was placed under international supervision: the *sanjak* of Drama to Great Britain, the *sanjak* of Seres to France, the *sanjak* of Salonica to Russia, the *sanjak* of Skopje to Austria, and the *sanjak* of Monastir to Italy.⁷⁷

The Mürzsteg reforms were above all dependent on the new, internationally trained *gendarmerie* to create sufficient local security to allow the financial and administration reforms to be carried out.⁷⁸ Despite the commitment to train a new gendarmerie to protect against both banditry and ethnic reprisals in the region, such security proved elusive. Lacking sufficient Christian volunteers, less than ten percent of the new gendarmerie was Greek or Slav in origin. Violence in the Macedonian lands actually increased, becoming a several-sided conflict between local *chetti*, Bulgarian Supremacist bands, emerging Greek and Serbian guerilla groups and reprisals by both the Ottoman army and local irregulars. The Mürzsteg reforms found no favor with local inhabitants, the paramilitary movements or Ottoman officials in the *vilayets*. For local inhabitants and officials, the reforms proved ineffectual in improving either economic

⁷⁶ Steven W. Sowards, *Austria's Policy of Macedonian Reform* (New York: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1989), 24. See also Gligor Todorovski, *Makedonskoto prashanje I reformite vo Makedonija* (Skopje: Kultura, 1989), 131-168.

⁷⁷ Douglas Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia, 1897-1913* (Thessalonika: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966), 159.

⁷⁸ Sowards, 33.

conditions or physical security.⁷⁹ For the paramilitaries, success would have been worse than failure. If the reforms actually proved effective, they could substantially reduce the support within the *vilayets* to unify part or all of Macedonia within a separate state or with “co-nationals” in neighboring Bulgaria, Greece or Serbia. The period after 1903, then, did not result in a return to general peace in Macedonia but rather created a general sense of anarchy and a series of continuous guerilla conflicts between rival groups. Each of these, and their relevance to Pirin, is described briefly below.

Intra-Macedonian Conflict

The disaster of Ilinden fragmented the fragile alliance between the Supremacists and VMRO. Immediately in the fall of 1903, serious breaks emerged between a “left wing” led by Dame Gruev (born in Smilevo in the Monastir *kaza*, and one of VMRO’s original founders) and a “right wing” drawn from the Supremacist leadership around General Ivan Tsonchev. This break was formalized in 1905 at the Rila Congress, when a unified congress of VMRO and the Supremacists met to review the events of the Uprising and to determine the future plans of the movement.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Todorovski, 204-210.

⁸⁰ On the post-Ilinden rebuilding, see Petrov, 117-126; on post-Ilinden tensions see Kiril Purlichev, *36 Godini vuv VMRO: Spomeni na Kiril Purlichev* (Sofia: VEDA-MZh, 1999), 66-74; Adanir, *Die Makedonische Frage*, 200-209.

At the congress, the “left wing”⁸¹ of the movement was able to secure a majority. Not only did it steer the Organization away from major direct confrontations with the Ottoman government, it also sought to reduce the power of the Central Committee. This “left wing” of VMRO returned to a policy of preparation for a future uprising, reducing the Central Committee to a coordinating body and placing most administrative power in the hands of local district leaders. Until the expected peasant revolt was prepared, less costly raids were now preferred in the interim.⁸² This provoked members who sympathized with the Supremacists to form their own, “right wing,” which grew as moderates within the movement (including the followers of Dame Gruev and Hristo Tatarchev, two of the original founders) drifted right in response to the left wing’s flirtation with socialist ideas. With the active assistance of the Supremacists, this right wing vied for control of *cheti* and the movement in general. Both turned to terrorist attacks, retaining hope that international involvement could be obtained. In the first of these, Supremacist-backed *cheti* made a half-dozen attempts in June and July 1904 to dynamite freight and passenger trains.

⁸¹ This terminology derives from the Marxist framework. While it is problematic to affiliate VMRO’s “left wing” of 1905 too closely Socialist or Communist ideology, members of its inner circle (including both Yane Sandanski, Dimo Hadzhidimov and Petur Arsov) advocated a turn to an ill-defined “revolutionary socialism.” Some of its surviving membership would play a role in the later creation of the Communist VMRO-United movement after 1924.

⁸² Stoian Germanov, “Vutreshnata makedono-odrinska revoliutsionna organizatsiia sled vustanieto,” in Milcho Lalkov “Miortsshtegskata reformena programma,” in Veselin Traikov, ed., *Natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie na makedonskite i trakiiskite bulgari 1878-1944: Tom treti, Osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie sled Ilindensko-preobrazhenskoto vustanie, 1903-1919* (Sofia: Makedonski nauchen institut and Institut po istoriia pri BAN, 1997), 44-51.

This division, which greatly weakened the Macedonian movement, ensured that large-scale uprisings such as 1902 and 1903 were no longer possible. Instead, VMRO *cheti* increasingly turned to outright terrorist tactics against the Ottoman regime and against rival factions. *Cheti* attacked the Kumanov-Skopje train in 1910. Over 1911, they bombed the railway station and mosque in Shtip, the city hall in Kichevo, a bank in Salonika and the railway station in Veles. Kochana's marketplace was bombed, and attacks were made on the Austro-Hungarian post office and the rail depot in Salonika as well as on the city hall in Krushevo. Each attack sparked reprisals by Ottoman officials. Nor were such attacks limited to Ottoman territory; in 1915, a bombing attack on a Sofia casino killed a family member of the current Bulgarian minister of war.⁸³

The division within the Macedonian paramilitary movement thus began the fratricidal conflict that would plague it over the following four decades. VMRO would further divide into factions based in part on ideology — a left-leading “autonomist” faction, and a Bulgarophile right-wing — and in part in terms of personality and locality. The two factions almost immediately began a low-key civil war that within a decade saw the assassination or death in combat of much of the original leadership of VMRO and the Supremacists. Dame Gruev remained a moderating figure within the combined paramilitary movement as a whole and attempted to reconcile the left and right wings, but he was killed in December 1906 in a clash with Ottoman forces.

⁸³ Bell, 100-103; Crampton 445. See also Hristo Matov, quoted in Leon Trotsky, “The Chetniks and the War,” original in *Kievskaya Mysl*, #293, October 22, 1912, in *The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913*, George Weissman and Duncan Williams, eds., Brian Pearce, trans. (New York: Monad Press, 1980), 230-231.

Within Pirin, open conflict erupted between rival *cheti* over 1904-1906. Sandanski, emerging as the leader of the “Seres Group,” oversaw the five *kazas* of Pirin plus those around Seres to the south and held to the “left” VMRO. The response of the Supremacists was a major armed incursion in April 1905 that led to open fighting with Sandanski’s forces and roughly 25 deaths. In 1907, a Pirin *cheta* led by Todor Panitsa assassinated Boris Sarafov, who had come to the region to agitate on behalf of the right-wing. In the post-IIlinden period, Sandanski set the precedent for the leader of Pirin’s VMRO to establish personal rule over the region, as well as the pattern of fratricidal conflict that would plague the movement in Pirin into the interwar years.

Greek and Serbian Paramilitaries

Following the Ilinden Uprising, both Greek and Serbian paramilitaries now contested both Ottoman authorities and the factions of VMRO. Within Pirin, such Greek bands were by far the more immediate threat. A pro-Greek organization — the *Ethniki Etaireia* (National Society) — had already been founded in 1894 in Salonika with the intention of promoting Greek cultural and identity in the region. As noted in Chapter Two, Greek interests were already in conflict with those of the local Slav inhabitants, given the existing clash between the Patriarchate and Exarchate over control of Macedonian diocese and education. In the struggles between VMRO *cheti* and Ottoman authorities, the Greek community in Pirin had sided with the latter though it took little part in the fighting.

After 1894, however, a Greek “revolutionary generation” of the 1890s emerged as it did among the Slav inhabitants of the *vilayets*. The *Ethniki Etaireia*

looked forward to the inclusion of Macedonia within the Greek state. It also favored a military solution to realize the *Megali Idea* and unite Crete, Epirus and southern Macedonia with the Greek state. The organization took on an overtly military profile as more and more military officers joined, to the point that 80 percent of the members were officers.⁸⁴ Proximity to the predominantly Greek-inhabited regions south of Serres and the existence of Greek communities in Serres and Melnik meant the Greek *andartes* (guerillas) could count on support in opposing Bulgarian *chetti*.

A forceful advancement of Greek interests in Macedonia was delayed by the military disaster of the 1897 Greco-Turkish War. Attempts by Greece to annex Crete, Thessaly and Epirus met with disaster and defeat. Greek efforts in Macedonia were thus stymied for the moment; but by 1904-1905, Greek bands were again active in Macedonia.⁸⁵ In 1905, Greek *andartes* were able to drive VMRO *chetti* out of the region of Salonika and out of most of the southern Monastir *vilayet*. Their numbers swollen to more than 1,500 guerillas, the Greek paramilitary bands were able to seize more of Monastir over 1906-1907.⁸⁶ By 1906 the *andartes* had spread in strength to the *kazas* around Seres and Drama to the immediate south of Pirin. Sandanski enforced boycotts against Greek merchants who supported Greek armed bands. He also sent *chetti* both to skirmish with the *andartes* and to conduct reprisals against local Greeks assisting

⁸⁴ Roudmetof, *Nationalism*, 166; Richard Clogg, *A Short History of Modern Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 95.

⁸⁵ Petrov, 132-134.

⁸⁶ Douglas Dakin, *The Greek Struggle for Macedonia, 1897-1913* (Thessalonika: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1966), 253-255, 306-307.

them. Significant fighting erupted over 1906-1908 in the *sanjaks* of Serres and Drama, as Bulgarian *cheti* and locals clashed with the *andartes*, especially near Melnik with its predominantly ethnically Greek population.⁸⁷

Although Serbia advanced no claims on Pirin and posed no real threat to the inhabitants of the region, a Serbian paramilitary group supported by Belgrade began to operate in the Kosovo *vilayet* and northern regions of the Monastir *vilayet* in 1904. Serbian interest in expanding into the Macedonian *vilayets* was less pronounced than the desire for unification with Bosnia. Serbia accordingly pursued expansion in Macedonia most strongly in periods when Austro-Hungarian action in 1878 (the latter's occupation of Bosnia-Hercegovina) and 1908 (formal annexation) forestalled the prospect of a successful "northern" strategy.

The *Društvo Svetog Sava* (Society of Saint Sava), had been founded in 1886 following Serbia's defeat in the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885. The Society promoted Serbian cultural mobilization and entered the *Kirchenkampf* in the Macedonian lands by funding the building and maintenance of Serbian Orthodox Churches in the *vilayets* (as noted in Chapter Two). The society dissolved within a decade; and although a new group was founded, the *Političko Prosvetno Odelenije* (Political-Education Section), it too remained relatively ineffective and

⁸⁷ Veselin Traikov, "Chuzhdite narodnostni i prosvetno-religiozni propagandi i dvizheniia," in Veselin Traikov, ed., *Natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie na makedonskite i trakiiskite bulgari 1878-1944: Tom treti, Osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie sled Ilindensko-preobrazhenskoto vustanie, 1903-1919* (Sofia: Makedonski nauchni institut and Institut po istorii pri BAN, 1997), 152-164.

opened only a few Serbian schools and churches. These were mostly concentrated along the Serbian border in the *vilayets* of Kosovo and Monastir.

The intensifying conflict between Bulgarian and Greek bands in the Macedonian lands, however, created a new opportunity. Support grew in the Serbian government, particularly among army officers, for the creation of a Serbian-backed armed movement to contest for Macedonia. The result was the creation in 1904 of a Četnik movement drawn chiefly from local Serbs and pro-Serbian Macedonians in the Kosovo *vilayet* and trained by elements of the Serbian army. Although certainly the weakest of the foreign-backed groups, the Četniks were able to limit VMRO's activities in the northwest in the Skopje *kaza* and did on occasion arrange tactical alliances with other groups.⁸⁸ Though this posed no threat to Pirin, the emergence of the Četnici forced the weakened factions of VMRO to meet this threat, further dispersing their strength.

The Young Turks

The violence between the rival paramilitaries made it impossible for the Mürzsteg reforms to be carried out. The British government took an increasingly active diplomatic interest in the program, reinforced by Whitehall's interest in a *rapprochement* with Russia after 1907. The proposed new reforms threatened to

⁸⁸ David MacKenzie, "Serbia as Piedmont and the Yugoslav Idea, 1804-1914," *East European Quarterly* 28:2 (June 1994), 171-172; David MacKenzie, "Serbian Nationalist and Military Organizations and the Piedmont Idea, 1844-1914," *East European Quarterly* 26:3 (September 1982), 334; Svetlozar Eldurov, "Chuzdite narodnostni i prosvetno-religiozni propagandi i dvizheniiia," in Veselin Traikov, ed., *Natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie na makedonskite i trakiiskite bulgari 1878-1944: Tom treti, Osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie sled Ilindensko-preobrazeneskoto vustanie, 1903-1919* (Sofia: Makedonski nauchen institut and Institut po istoriia pri BAN, 1997), 169-170; Petrov, 132-134.

go farther than the Mürzsteg Agreement, first in including additional regions for the reform process (adding the several *sanjaks* of Kosovo excluded from the Mürzsteg purview, plus Eastern Thrace and Ioannina) and in specifying further autonomy for the provincial governors. The proposal would make the *valis* independent of the Sublime Porte for a period of at least ten years.⁸⁹ Local Turkish officers interpreted this as a pretext for future intervention in the Macedonian lands by the Great Powers. Given the history of previous interventions by outside states to grant “autonomy” to Ottoman provinces, this seemed to threaten the inevitable loss of the last Ottoman territories in Europe.

The Committee of Unity and Progress (*İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*), better known as the Young Turks, had already evolved from its origins as an émigré intellectual circle in 1899 in Paris, into a coalition of like-minded groups led by the Ottoman Freedom Society (*Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti*). By 1906 the Young Turks had established relations with other reform-minded groups among the Armenians, and had attempted to establish agreements with VMRO. In 1908, fearing that Britain and Russia planned to intervene and force a new series of reforms on Macedonia, the CUP staged a coup and succeeded in placing a new, reformist government in power. Following an unsuccessful counter-coup in April 1909 by the conservative and religious Muhammadan Union (*İttihad-i Muhammedi*), the Young Turks were able to further consolidate their hold on power.

⁸⁹ Hanioğlu, 234-236.

Macedonia was the center of CUP strength, and the Young Turks moved to secure cooperation in the region by promising economic reforms, stability and administrative reforms that would grant legal equality to non-Muslims. As such, the Young Turks were successful in forging agreements with “left wing” elements of VMRO, including the Serres Group led by Yane Sandanski.⁹⁰ Such cooperation lasted through the period 1908-1912, and included both the participation and candidacy in provincial parliamentary elections by members of VMRO.⁹¹ Sandanski even dispatched *cheti* under his command to defend the Young Turks’ hold on power.⁹² In return for a promise by the CUP to enact reforms granting improved conditions and rights to the non-Muslim population of the region and to provide for some measures of local autonomy, Sandanski’s faction of VMRO gave support and legitimacy to the Young Turk government — even as rival *cheti* continued to raid into other regions in Macedonia. The Supremacists and sympathetic factions within VMRO now targeted the left wing, twice attempting to assassinate Sandanski in 1908.

In the years leading up to the Young Turk Revolution, the conflict in the Macedonian lands had further intensified. Between 1903 to 1908 over 8,000 people were killed in acts of political violence. 3,500 of these were guerillas, the rest civilians killed in assassinations, massacres and in reprisal actions. The level of violence was visibly rising from year to year. According to Turkish reports, the

⁹⁰ On VMRO’s reaction to the Young Turk Revolution see Purlichev, 103-104.

⁹¹ Hanioğlu, 243-244, 246-247, 249.

⁹² During the attempted coup of April 1909, over 1,000 *komitadzhii* of the Seres group fought against the Young Turks’ conservative opponents. See Aleksandar Sojanovski, *Istorija na makedonskiot narod* (Skopje: Makedonska kniga, 1988), 189-190.

number of civilians killed in the *vilayets* rose from 468 in 1904, 600 in 1905, 1,108 in 1906 and 849 in 1907.⁹³ One result was a massive flight of Slav inhabitants from the province, tens of thousands emigrating to Bulgaria and, over the following decade, 40,000 leaving for North America.⁹⁴ At the same time, the Young Turk government encouraged the resettlement of Muslim refugees from Bosnia, Romania and Bulgaria in the Macedonian *vilayets*, diluting the local Christian population.⁹⁵

This state of affairs was intolerable for both local revolutionaries and for a Bulgarian government with claims on the region. Such levels of emigration would eventually strip the province of its Slav population. Pirin fared better than other areas, particularly those in the Monastir *vilayet*. Pirin's VMRO paramilitary force had emerged relatively intact from the Ilinden Uprising and the subsequent fighting, and its leadership under Sandanski enjoyed enhanced prestige for its role in the Ottoman Macedonian parliament. But as the Young Turks' program for a reformed, modernized, but also centralized Ottoman Empire became clear after 1910, *voivoda* under Sandanski began to urge action against the Young Turks. Within two years they would take up arms again, but the "local" military mobilization in Pirin and throughout the Macedonian lands as a whole now gave way to a series of conflicts in which the Slav inhabitants in Pirin rallied to serve first alongside, then within the regular army of the Bulgarian state.

⁹³ Sowards, 76-77.

⁹⁴ Sowards, 77.

⁹⁵ Todor Petrov, *Vuoruzhenata borba na VMORO v Makedonija i Odrinsko (1904-1912)* (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1991), 57-59.

Chapter Four

Common Struggle: War, the Bulgarian State and Pirin Macedonia, 1912-1923

“We operate alongside the Bulgarian army —
not only in its interests, but under the command of its officers”
—Hristo Matov, 1912¹

In October 1912, Leon Trotsky, serving as a war correspondent for *Kievskaya Mysl* covering the First Balkan War, interviewed the *voivoda* Hristo Matov. Born in Struga (near Ohrid), Matov had joined VMRO in the early 1900s and served as one of its ideologists of revolution before gravitating towards the right wing of the movement after its split in 1905. As the opening quote suggests, Matov confirmed that VMRO *cheti* throughout the Macedonian lands were integrated into the campaign at the service of the Bulgarian army.²

It would not, of course, serve the cause if we were to raise revolts in areas far away from the theater of war: that would only result in massacres.

Instead, he explained, the *cheti* carried out sabotage, “cutting telegraph wires wherever possible, tearing up rails, and that sort of thing.” In Pirin, for example, local *cheti* destroyed the bridge in the Kresna defile near Gorna Dzhumaia. In areas of active fighting, “the partisan units put themselves directly at the disposal of the army commanders,” serving alongside regular military units, providing

¹ Quoted in Leon Trotsky, “The Chetniks and the War,” original in *Kievskaya Mysl*, #293, October 22, 1912, in *The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913*. George Weissman and Duncan Williams, eds., Brian Pearce, trans. (New York: Monad Press, 1980).

² See also Petur Petrov, et. al., *Makedonija: Istorija i politicheska sudba (1912-1941)* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Znanie” OOD, 1998), 14.

reconnaissance and “constitut[ing] a constant threat to the Turks’ rear.”³ Matov noted in the interview that he supported the war, the Young Turks having failed to deliver upon promised reforms despite the cooperation of VMRO in the Seres *sanjak*.⁴ But, curiously, Matov refused to explain VMRO’s ultimate goal in joining the conflict:

What is it that we want to achieve — autonomy for Macedonia or union with Bulgaria? That is a perfectly natural question for you to ask. ... Now, however, when we are fighting with Serbia and Greece as our allies, I must ask permission not to reply to that last question of yours.⁵

In other words, the paramilitary put aside its own goals in the interests of serving the larger, state-led military alliance against the Ottoman Empire — a strange turn of events for a movement with a history of individual autonomy and a loose adherence to hierarchy and command. Trotsky noted this:

The war has absorbed the Macedonian revolutionary into itself. It has dispatched the “anarchist” [Misel] Gerdzhikov to cut telegraph lines, and entrusted the old plotter Georgi Petrov with running the supply services of the Macedonian Legion.

He concluded the article by suggesting that VMRO had been absorbed by the Bulgarian government wholesale.⁶

Matov’s interview reflected the transformation of the paramilitary movement that had begun in the First Balkan War. Over the long decade from 1912 to 1923, a series of larger conflicts centered on the Bulgarian state

³ Hristo Matov, in Trotsky, 233. See also Matov’s comments in Hristo Matov, *Mulchalivetsut ot Struga: ocherk za zhivota i deloto na makedonskiia revoliutsioner Hristo Matov* (Sofia: Izdanie na VMRO-SMD, 1993), 137.

⁴ Matov, in Trotsky, 227-231.

⁵ Matov, in Trotsky, 233.

⁶ Trotsky, 235. Both Gerdzhikov and Petrov (born in Varosh, in the Monastir *vilayet*) had been members of VMRO and active in the 1903 uprising.

subsumed the ongoing violence inside geographic Macedonia. These conflicts began with the First and Second Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, continued with Bulgaria's experience in the First World War during 1915-1918, and climaxed with the violent *coup d'état* against the post-war government of Aleksandur Stamboliiski. In each case, the fate of the Macedonian lands was at the heart of Bulgaria's conflicts both figuratively and literally. The desire to unify all Macedonian territories within a Bulgarian state lay behind the government's decision to enter each of the three wars — and the postwar *coup d'état* was triggered, in part, by Stamboliiski's decision to repudiate this policy. In each of the three wars Macedonia became a battlefield for the Bulgarian army, and the site of a low-intensity civil war in the postwar period of crisis. Pirin was Bulgaria's only profit from this process, the only part of geographic Macedonia it successfully incorporated.

Much as the larger Bulgarian context of conflict subsumed that of Macedonia lands so too did the Bulgarian state come to subsume the Macedonian paramilitaries. The Bulgarian army first attached the *cheti* as auxiliaries of the in 1912, then broke them up and drafted the former guerillas directly into the army in 1915. Finally, a new VMRO leadership reconstituted them over 1919-1921 as a centralized paramilitary force to contest with the regimes of Greece, the Yugoslav Kingdom and the Bulgarian regime of Aleksandur Stamboliiski. VMRO would now play an expanded domestic political role within Bulgaria. Pirin itself would be absorbed into the Bulgarian state in wartime, its resources and manpower drawn upon by central

authorities to sustain the effort for “total war.” After 1918, VMRO would move to control the region in order to secure a base of operations, financial support and a pool of manpower.

This represented a transition from “military mobilization” to state-building. The paramilitary *chetti* of the period 1893 through the campaigns in 1912 were locally raised and led and largely autonomous in terms of action. Divisions persisted within the leaderships of the paramilitary movement, continuing even after the merger of the Supremacists with VMRO in 1902. The result was a loose hierarchy of command. Over the period 1913-1918 the centralized hierarchy of the Bulgarian army replaced the paramilitary’s loose framework. The revitalized postwar paramilitary forces in Pirin would themselves remain stamped in this new organizational mold.

Bulgarian historiography refers to the defeats of the Second Balkan War and the First World War as “the national catastrophes,” shattering the established social and political order in Bulgaria.⁷ In Pirin the wars spanned another sort of turning point. Between 1912 and 1918 the shared experience of warfare superceded the earlier practice of military mobilization. State administration and a centralized hierarchy were first introduced during the wars, first paralleling and then subsuming Pirin’s own war effort. This marked a gradual transition to the third of Smith’s “nation-building” mechanisms, the

⁷ On the social and cultural impact of the wars, see Evelina Kelbetcheva, “Between Apology and Denial: Bulgarian Culture During World War I,” in Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, eds., *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 215-242.

experience of centralized administration and state-building.⁸ Such an “administrative mobilization” could help encourage a Bulgarian national consciousness in the process, but there remained the problem of Pirin’s existing regional identity. This chapter accordingly considers this conundrum, tracing the interrelationship of the Macedonian movement and the Bulgarian state in this period of conflict. It was a relationship that shaped the experience of Pirin in the interwar period and thereby posed a fateful contest between local autonomy and state centralization.

Bulgaria and the First Balkan War

The continuing conflict in Macedonia and the suffering of its inhabitants in the last prewar decade placed persistent pressure on the Bulgarian government to intervene in the region. “For public opinion ... Bulgarian foreign policy revolved around only one question, Macedonia.”⁹ The failure of Ilinden had demonstrated that the Macedonian armed movement was not strong enough to force an Ottoman withdrawal and that no Great Power could be expected to intervene on behalf of the Macedonian *vilayets’* population. The emergence of a multi-sided conflict across the Macedonia lands after 1903, and the subsequent rounds of violence and reprisals, only added to the frustration building in Sofia.

The Young Turk Revolution, outlined in Chapter Three, reinforced the perceived need for an activist foreign policy in Sofia. Just as the CUP staged

⁸ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986), 157-161.

⁹ Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (Oxford: Routledge, 2000), 6.

their revolt for fear that the international situation would weaken the Empire's ability to retain Macedonia, interventionists in Bulgaria feared that if the Young Turks were successful in their reform program, the Ottoman hold on Macedonia would be strengthened and Bulgarian annexation forestalled. In particular, they worried that the local Slav population might turn away from union with Bulgaria. Even if the initial participation of the Seres Group of VMRO in Young Turks' reforms in the Macedonian *vilayets* was merely a tactical alliance, it still lent credibility and strength to the Ottoman regime.¹⁰ The Young Turks continued and accelerated the pace of military reform in terms of both training and equipment, particularly the addition of imported 75mm cannon and Mauser rifles.¹¹ This advance provided incentives for Bulgaria to fight before the reforms could be completed. Rising tensions among Albanians over 1910-1911 echoed this dilemma. Albanians openly revolted against the Porte and demanded autonomy — including regions within the *vilayets* of Prishtina and Monastir (e.g., Kosovo and Vardar Macedonia). If Albanians were successful in obtaining autonomy, this would further limit the chances for the existing independent Balkan states to expand into Ottoman territory.

Finally, the period after 1908 saw crucial divisions emerging among the Great Powers. As long as they had continued to "close ranks" and attempt to suppress instability in the region, Bulgaria could not press an active foreign policy. In September 1908 the Foreign Ministers of Russia and Austria-Hungary,

¹⁰ Hanioğlu, 246-247, 249.

¹¹ Edward Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans, 1912-1913* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 13-42, 47.

Aleksander Izvolski and Alois Aehrenthal, had met to forge an agreement in which Russia would support Austria-Hungary in transforming its occupation of Bosnia-Hercegovina into outright annexation. In return, Austria-Hungary would support Russia's efforts to secure full transit rights through the Straits of the Bosphorus. Once Austria-Hungary had declared its annexation of Bosnia, this support proved illusory. Relations between Vienna and St. Petersburg grew tense and close cooperation on Balkan issues ended. In the same month of September 1908, the Bulgarian government took advantage of these divisions to declare its full independence from the Ottoman Empire.¹²

By 1911, the Bulgarian government began to explore agreements with other Balkan states for a pre-emptive war against the Ottomans that would secure at least part of Macedonia and thereby win domestic approval. These agreements were hastened by Italy's declaration of war on the Ottoman Empire in 1911 and invasion of Tripoli, which defeated Ottoman troops in Libya and promised to draw troops and supplies away from the Balkans. In early 1912 Serbia and Bulgaria negotiated a treaty that provided for mutual military support in a war with the Ottomans. Both states could agree on Bulgarian expansion into the Pirin *kazas* and remainder of the northeastern Selânik *vilayet* and Serbian expansion into the Kosovo *vilayet*. But a sizeable stretch of territory remained disputed between the two states in the *vilayet* of Monastir. Pressured by the

¹² Despite the creation of the Bulgarian state in 1878, and even following its union with Eastern Rumelia in 1885, the Ottoman Empire continued to hold titular sovereignty over Bulgaria. The declaration of independence in 1908 was symbolic, but advanced diplomatic representation and secured increased prestige for the Bulgarian government and monarchy.

potentially narrow window of opportunity to attack the Ottoman Empire, the Bulgarian government agreed to wait for future arbitration by the Russian tsar.¹³ The Bulgarian and Greek governments signed a similar agreement for military cooperation in the summer of 1912 but came to no agreement regarding territorial division.¹⁴ With the conclusion of an alliance between Serbia and Montenegro, these various agreements constituted the Balkan League.

Bulgaria began to prepare its armed forces for the coming conflict. With the reserves called up, its army would total nearly 600,000 (out of an adult male population of 1.9 million).¹⁵ Leaders within émigré Macedonian circles in Bulgaria advanced proposals in the summer of 1912 to raise their own units from among the refugees living in Bulgaria. Moreover, they proposed that the army utilize VMRO *cheti* from both the left and right wings of the movement.¹⁶ The Bulgarian government agreed. Since, however, the main Bulgarian thrust was to take place on the eastern Thracian front, the *cheti* were ordered to cooperate with all three of the allied armies fighting in Macedonia. In addition, the Bulgarian Army raised a separate force with the cooperation of VMRO leaders. The *Makedonski-*

¹³ Micho Lalkov, *Mezhdu vuztorga i pokrusata: Bulgaria po vreme na voinite, 1912-1918 g.* (Sofia: Slov D, 1993), 13-14.

¹⁴ Hall, 11-13.

¹⁵ Vachkov, 26; Hall, 24.

¹⁶ Dimitar Minchev, “Partizanskie cheti na VMORO v Makedonii: Makedonskite i trakiiskite bulgari v bulgarskata armiya po vreme na voinata,” in Traikov, 348-350. By 1912 VMRO’s influence in Thrace had faded, and the bulk of its *cheti* were based in the Macedonian lands; only six *cheti* were active in Thrace during the war. Lalkov, 29-30.

odrinski Opulchenie (Macedonian-Adrianople¹⁷ Volunteers, or MOO) — would be organized by the Bulgarian Army and fight alongside its existing units.

Co-Belligerent Auxiliaries in the Balkan Wars

The *Makedonski-odrinski Opulchenie* possessed distinctive characteristics in terms of organization, equipment and utilization. MOO's membership was recruited from émigrés and refugees from Macedonia and organized as a separate unit.¹⁸

Table 4
Volunteers for the Macedonian-Adrianople Corps by *Kaza* of Birth¹⁹
(Pirin Kazas in bold)

Debar	1,011	Serres	197
Nevrokop	715	Salonika	194
Kuskush	512	Tetovo	171
Prilep	501	Gorna Dzhumaia	162
Biotla	457	Strumitsa	143
Veles	449	Petrich	129
Shtip	440	Drama	124
Egri-Palanka	431	Tikvesh	108
Kostur	409	Enidje-Var	104
Razlog	359	Gostivar	104
Kichevo	350	Vodena	79
Krushevo	250	Doiran	73
Gevgeli	246	Resen	47
Melnik	240	Struga	40
Demir Hisar*	234	Kaylare	36
Skopje	207	Pehchevo	16
Kochani	203	Negotin	12
Kumanovo	202	Zunha	4

¹⁷ English translations for MOO, like BMARO and TMARO (noted in Chapter Three) use Adrianople rather than Edirne. This convention is followed here.

¹⁸ Although most of the volunteers were of Slav Macedonian origin, there were two notable exceptions. Nearly all the officers were drawn from volunteers serving in the regular army, including many originating from elsewhere in Bulgaria; and Armenians from Lozengrad were recruited and served in the 12th Lozengradksa battalion.

¹⁹ As provided in text in M. Voynov and L. Panayotov, eds., *Documents and Materials on the History of the Bulgarian People* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na bulgarskata akademija na naukite, 1969), 382-383.

Three brigades totaling 14,670 men were raised in all. Of these recruits, roughly 18 percent originated from the Pirin region (see Table Four), many likely crossing the border into Bulgaria to join the units. The MOO followed the Bulgarian army's recruitment system, basing units on the German model of geographic origin. Volunteers were assigned to units by their birthplace. Six battalions were authorized on September 25, 1912: the 1st Debar, 2nd Skopje, 3rd Solun (Salonika), 4th Bitola (Monastir), and the 5th and 6th Odrin (Edirne). A further six battalions were raised in October 1912: the 7th Kumanovo, 8th Kosturia, 9th Belesh, 10th Prilep, 11th Seres and 12th Lozengrad. Effectively, this meant that the volunteers could associate their battalion with existing local Macedonian identities. One recruiting statement, for example, stressed:

Every Macedonian living in Ruse, capable of [bearing] arms,
get ready to begin. Expect the moment for embarkation...²⁰

The MOO corps was a Macedonian unit serving within the Bulgarian army, and was announced as such.²¹

The Bulgarian army assigned distinctive uniforms and outfitting to the Volunteers. By 1900, the Bulgarian army had established its own standard set of uniforms and insignia, although supply shortages meant that older uniform elements were sometimes retained until old stocks were exhausted or new ones arrived. The general staff assigned each branch of the army — cavalry, artillery,

²⁰ Todor Bogdanov, ed., *Natsionalnoosvoboditelnite borbi na bulgarite ot Makedoniia i odrinkska Trakiia prez Balkanskata voina, 1912-1913* (Sofia: Iz-vo "Sv. Georgi Podebonosets," 1994), 51.

²¹ On the connection between the army and MOO, see Svetlozar Eldurov, "Makedono-odrinskoto dvizhenie v Bulgaria i ofitserskite bratsva v Bulgarskata armiya v navecherieto na Balkanskata voina (ion-avgust 1912 g.)," *Izvestiia na durzhavnite arhivi* 61 (1991).

engineers, etc — standardized insignia and shoulder boards. The only significant variation to this pattern were the special uniform elements allowed to the nine regiments (of 36 total) named in honor of members of the royal family — but this was limited to color combinations for the uniform piping and shoulder boards.²²

Volunteers' uniforms were unusual for deviating from this pattern. That this decision was deliberate is suggested by the need for advance planning to procure, manufacture and distribute uniforms before the First Balkan War began. Unlike the red piping and shoulder boards used by regular and reserve infantry, the Volunteers were issued green ones — a choice intended to link them with the Bulgarian volunteers who served with the Russian Army in the war of 1877-78. The service cap was different as well, resembling a peasant's fur *shapka*. Instead of the standard royal seal the army issued a new crest. Here, the rampant lion symbolic of Bulgaria at war held a flag emblazoned with "MOO" and trampling a crescent and star underfoot, symbolizing the enemy Ottoman Empire.²³ Volunteers also generally wore *tzarvuli*, the traditional sandals of Christian Slav

²² Normally the key variation was the color of shoulder boards, which distinguished the branch (e.g., red for infantry and cavalry, black for artillery and support services). Red pipings were standard for all branches. However, units named for members of the royal family used other color schemes: Her Royal Highness Princess Maria Louisa Sax-Coburg-Gota's 8th Infantry Regiment wore light blue shoulder boards and red pipings, while His Royal Highness Karl Edward Duke of Sax-Coburg-Gota's 22nd Infantry Regiment wore red shoulder boards and white pipings. Named regiments also wore crests with embroidered monograms. Alexander Vachkov, *The Balkan War, 1912-1913* (Sofia: Anzhela, 2005), 20.

²³ Vachkov, 71, 84.

peasantry still characteristic across the Macedonia lands at that time, rather than the stipulated boots, as can be seen in Figure 7.²⁴

Figure 7
Soldiers in the Macedonian-Adrianople Corps



Undated photograph, personal collection of the author.

While the Bulgarian army had issued their distinctive uniform, the Volunteers themselves chose distinctive battalion flags with meanings tied to local identity. Each battalion possessed its own unique design and symbolic references. Such symbols included religious figures such as the icons of Saints Cyril and Methodius on the flag of the 11th Seres battalion, references to the Bulgarian state such as the Bulgarian tricolor and seal used on the flag of the 4th Bitola battalion, and references to VMRO such as the use of the slogan “*Svoboda ili smrт*” — “Freedom or Death.” Individual companies usually added

²⁴ Although the use of traditional footwear by MOO was distinctive, some serving soldiers in the Bulgarian army during the Balkan Wars also wore the *tzarvuli* due to shortages in boot procurement, as a cursory examination of photographs of the conflict reveals.

additional references — for example, embroidering the name of the town that the company had been recruited from. The Pirin *kazas* were represented by for the companies from Razlog, Gorna Dzhumaia and Nevrokop.²⁵

In addition to the MOO, the Bulgarian government with the assistance of VMRO recruited approximately 2,000 *komitadzhii* to serve as irregular forces during the fighting. Providing their own clothes and arms, the *komitadzhii* were not intended for use as regular troops, although provisions were made to attach *cheti* to regular units for scouting and reconnaissance. The *cheti* were allowed independent actions such as sabotage, interdicting Ottoman supply routes, harassing of small Ottoman units and garrisons and intercepting of enemy communications. VMRO remained responsible for their organization, forming them into some 54 *cheti*.²⁶

The Balkan Wars and Macedonia

Bulgaria entered the First Balkan War on October 17, 1912 to widespread domestic approval.²⁷ Two weeks before the campaign, for example, the newspaper *Bulgariia* exhorted:

²⁵ Note the photographs and color plates in Ivan Ivanov, *Bulgarski voini znamena i flagove* (Sofia: Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets, 1998).

²⁶ Todor Bogdanov, ed., *Natsionalnoosvoboditelnite borbi na bulgarite ot Makdoniia i odrinkska Trakiia prez Balkanskata voina, 1912-1913* (Sofia: Iz-vo "Sv. Georgi Podebonosets," 1994), 110; Petur Petrov, ed., *Makedoniia: Istorija i politicheska sudba, 1912-1941* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Znanie" OOD, 1998), 14-15; Hristo Matov quoted in Trotsky, 233.

²⁷ A crowd of some 50,000 had demonstrated in favor of war with the Ottomans. "Entusiazm't v stolitsata: Vcherashnata grandiozna mainfestatsiya vuodushevlenieto," originally in *Mir* #33660, Sept 20, 1912, in Pasha Kishkilova, ed., *Balkanskite voini po stranitsite na bulgarskiat pechat, 1912-1913*. (Sofia:

To arms, Bulgaria! To crush the enemy of centuries and to make Macedonia a seat of civilization, prosperity and peace!²⁸

Although public support was for a war that would secure Macedonia's union with Bulgaria, the government's war aims were directed towards annexation of the *vilayet* of Edirne and, ultimately, of Istanbul itself.

Given the considerable Ottoman effort at fortifying the city of Edirne since 1908, a campaign there would require a significant military force²⁹ The army's general staff under General Mikhail Savov, supported by Tsar Ferdinand, thus resolved to focus

Bulgaria's military strength on this thrust into Eastern Thrace. This would be the chief theater of war, accompanied by a smaller campaign into the Rhodopi Mountains in Western Thrace, the intent

Figure 8
Theaters of the First Balkan War, 1912



being to outflank the Ottoman 2nd Macedonian Army and prevent Ottoman forces

Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov," 1999), 26-28.

²⁸ "Chastut udari! Manifestut podpisan, nastupvaneto na Bulgarskite voiski," originally in *Bulgariia* #170, Oct. 5, 1912, in Kishkilova, 39.

²⁹ Erickson, 78-79. The Ottoman Army anticipated precisely this Bulgarian strategy and prepared its defensive strategies in the 1910 and 1912 Eastern Army Plans accordingly.

in Eastern Thrace and Macedonia from linking up. The general staff assigned the Macedonian-Adrianople Volunteer Corps to this attack into Western Thrace. MOO, raised and recruited for the liberation of its members' homelands, would not actually serve on the Macedonian front. Arguably, the light arms and generally poor training of the MOO corps meant it was better deployed in garrison duties through the Rhodopi Mountains.³⁰ As deployed, the MOO forces were better suited to government-orchestrated (and in some cases local and spontaneous) attempts to forcibly "de-Islamicize" the Pomak population of the region.³¹

In the *vilayets* of Monastir and Kosovo the Bulgarian army surrendered the initiative to the Serbian 2nd Army. Relying on the 1912 agreement with Serbia to secure future gains in the Monastir *vilayet*, the Bulgarian army spent most of its energy on the Eastern Thracian front. Flush with success in conquering Edirne, the army attempted to press on to Istanbul but was stopped by November 17-22 at Chataldzha. After bitter fighting and heavy casualties, the result was a stalemate leading to successive but short-lived ceasefires in December and January 1913. Desultory combat continued afterward until the Ottomans sought an armistice on May 30, 1913.

In the Macedonian lands, agreements between Serbia and Bulgaria called for a broad Serbian thrust southwards directly against the Ottoman 2nd

³⁰ Hall, 24.

³¹ On the de-Islamization campaign, see Velichko Georgiev and Staiko Trifanov, eds., *Pokrustvaneto na bulgarite mohamedani, 1912-1913: Dokumenti* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov," 1995).

Macedonian Army.³² Although the planned concentration against Eastern Thrace led the Bulgarian general staff to deny Serbian requests for a significant Bulgarian force, it did place the 7th Rila Division under Serbian command. This division was deployed in the eastern end of the theater and given orders to move south to protect the flank of the Serbian forces — and to liberate the Pirin *kazas*. Facing the Balkan League's forces was the Ottoman 2nd Army, drawn from both Ottoman regular units as well as militia raised in the Macedonian *vilayets*. Like the Balkan League's order of battle, the majority of Turkish forces were deployed to the west in the Kosovo and Monastir *vilayets*. Protecting the Ottomans' own eastern flank was the Uştruma (Struma) Corps, placed in the Kresna Gap of the Struma River valley but with a significant militia force garrisoned in Nevrokop.³³

In the subsequent campaign, the Bulgarian 7th Rila took the initiative, crossing the border into Pirin on October 18 and seizing Gorna Dzhumaia. It then closed in on Kresna by October. A separate attack pushed against Nevrokop. The town fell by October 28, prompting a general Ottoman retreat from the Pirin *kazas* to Serres by November 1. The poorly handled retreat divided Ottoman forces, allowing the 7th Rila Division to break through Ottoman lines and advance towards Salonika.³⁴ Serbian forces, however, fought the larger and more significant series of engagements against the main Ottoman force. Slowly driving the Ottoman 2nd Army back, the Serbians reached Skopje on October 26, Bitola on November 19 and Ohrid on November 22, securing not only the entire

³² Erickson, 163-205.

³³ Erickson, 195.

³⁴ Erickson, 201-202.

disputed zone but territory in the eastern Monastir *vilayet* originally allocated to Bulgaria. The Bulgarian army correspondingly occupied outright only a small part of the Macedonian lands: the Pirin *kazas* formed its core, with a small fringe of territory to the west (including Strumitsa and Shtip) and most of the remaining Seres *sanjak* to the south of Pirin.

The Bulgarians similarly failed to reach Salonika, the chief prize in the geographic Macedonia. The Greek high command surprised the Ottoman defenders on the Thessalian Front by allocating all seven divisions of the Greek army to an attack towards Salonika, which surrendered on terms on October 26, 1912. Negotiations with the Greek government allowed for a token Bulgarian force to participate in the occupation of Salonika, but the small detachment was overawed by Greek forces in the city.

VMRO cooperated in establishing of the new civil-military administration in Pirin Macedonia. A Bulgarian military government quickly displaced Ottoman authorities in territory occupied during the war.³⁵ The Bulgarian army established a new system of four *okrugi* (provinces): Drama, Seres, Shtip and Solun. The army further established *okolii* (districts) as well. Pirin fell under the Seres *okrug*, the army established *okolii* for Petrich, Melnik, Gorna Dzhumaia, Razlog and Nevrokop, continuing the administrative traditions of the former Ottoman *kazas*. Interim administrators were appointed and included members of VMRO.³⁶ The

³⁵ Momchil Ionov and Radka Khandzhieva, "Svidetelstvo za bulgarskata voennoadministrativna vlast v Makedonija prez Balkanskata voina 1912-1913 godina," *Voenno-istoricheski sbornik* 57:2 (1988), 82-83.

³⁶ Note the autobiographical comments in this regard as regards Anton Dimitrov, "Spomeni," in *Vutreshnata makedono-Odrinska revoliotsionna organizatsiia: Prez*

Bulgarian government, for example, appointed Yane Sandanski (who continued as leader of VMRO in the Pirin region) to the position of mayor of Melnik.³⁷ The result was the steady expansion of the Bulgarian state authority across wartime Pirin, in cooperation with local paramilitary forces.

Inter-allied Tensions and the Second Balkan War

Victorious on the battlefield, the Balkan League was now confronted with how to divide the spoils. Bulgaria faced challenges from Greece and Serbia over the disposition of Macedonia, and Romania now requested compensation in the Dobrudzha, bordering the Black Sea. Bulgarian forces had garrisoned towns in the new *okolii* of Pirin and elsewhere in the former *sanjak* of Serres. Bulgaria's focus on the campaign around Edirne, as noted, allowed Greek forces to press farther north than anticipated. The two states now clashed over claims to the former *vilayet* of Selânik. Bulgaria claimed territory as far south as Salonika, and Greece claimed territory as far north as Melnik.

Intervention by Italy and Austria-Hungary unexpectedly added to the conflict between Bulgaria and Serbia. In the pre-war agreements, Serbia and Montenegro would divide the *vilayet* of Shkodër and Greece would absorb the *vilayet* of Janinë, despite ethnic Albanian majorities in both provinces. Rome and Vienna insisted on the creation of an independent Albanian state encompassing the territory of most of the two *vilayets*, eliminating Serbia and Greece's territorial

pogleda na neinite osnovateli, edited by Todor Petrov and Tsocho Biliarski (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 2002), 189; also Petrov, 16.

³⁷ Georgi Genov, "Bulgarskoto voenno gubernatorstvo v Makedonija (Noemvri 1912-luni 1913 g.)," *Istoricheski Pregled* 41:7 (1985), 40.

gains there. Accordingly, both Serbia and Greece states sought territorial compensation elsewhere, in territory in the *vilayets* of Monastir and Selânik originally claimed by Bulgaria. In addition, although Romania had not participated in the First Balkan War, its government demanded territory in the Dobruzhda at the expense of Bulgaria in consideration for its wartime neutrality.³⁸

Greek and Serbian administration of the Macedonian territory they occupied soon prompted accusations that both governments ignored the contributions of local *cheti* and instead sought to eliminate them as military and political forces.³⁹ Moreover, local resentments rose in the face of forced requisitions by Serbian and Greek troops to cover occupation costs, and accusations of crimes against the civilian population.⁴⁰ VMRO began to agitate against both the Serbian and Greek civil-military administration in the region, launching sporadic acts of violence against occupation officials and troops in the summer of 1912. This agitation also swung public opinion in Bulgaria away from its former allies in the Balkan League.

This impasse over the fate of the Macedonian lands led directly to the Second Balkan War (called the Inter-allied War in Bulgarian historiography) from June 19, 1913 to August 1913. Bulgaria began the war with a surprise attack on

³⁸ Hall, *Balkan Wars* 88-89.

³⁹ See Petrov, 24-28; also Matov's account in his memoirs, 138-139;

⁴⁰ The damaging impact of the Serbian administration in Vardar Macedonia has been a focus for Macedonian historiography after 1991. See Gligor Todorovski, *Makedonija po rasparchuvanje 1912/13-1915* (Skopje: Matitsa Makedonska, 1995). The traditional Bulgarian view is reflected in Petrov, 39-51.

Serbian and Greek units, but its forces were soon pushed back.⁴¹ Both Greece and Serbia then launched counter attacks, forcing Bulgarian retreats from most of the Macedonian territory it controlled.⁴² Bulgarian positions in Salonika, Shtip and Seres were overrun, and Greek troops entered the Pirin *kazas*, pushing the front lines as far north as Gorna Dzhumaia. A strong defense then turned back the Greek advance, and retreating Greek forces in Pirin were subsequently defeated at Kresna Gorge, suffering nearly 10,000 casualties. The entry of Romania and then the Ottoman Empire in July dashed any remaining Bulgarian hopes for victory, as they opened new fronts against Bulgaria in Dobrudzha and Eastern Thrace, respectively.

Following this sound defeat, the Treaty of Bucharest of 1913 left Bulgaria with minimal territorial gains, to be subsequently referred to as the first “national catastrophe.”⁴³ At the cost of the southern Dobrudzha, Bulgaria retained western Thrace but only a fraction of the Macedonian lands. The partition of Macedonia by surrounding states in 1913 now replaced the previous division of Macedonia between the three *vilayets*. The Serbian territories would be referred to as Vardar Macedonia, Greek territories as Aegean Macedonia, and the limited Bulgarian territory as Pirin Macedonia, consisting of the five Ottoman Pirin *kazas* plus the town and the hinterland of Strumitsa. The Ministry of Internal Affairs reorganized the region as the Strumitsa *okrug*, with five districts. Although Melnik and Petrich

⁴¹ In popular Bulgarian historiography, the attack is justified by the “conspiracy against Bulgaria” by Greece and Serbia. Note Petrov’s use of the term, 19.

⁴² Montenegro entered the war in support of Serbia, but its forces were not in a position to take an active part in the fighting.

⁴³ As in Lakov, 65.

were unified in a single *okoliia*, much of the old *kaza* organization was retained when the Bulgarian government organized the districts around Strumitsa, Petrich, Gorna Dzhumaia, Razlog and Nevrokop. Pirin was now a region encompassing five towns, 237 villages and a total of 155,598 people, a fraction of the *vilayets'* combined population of 2.2 million.⁴⁴

The First World War

At the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, Bulgaria remained neutral. Both the Central Powers and the Entente courted Bulgaria, which played each side off against the other for the first year of the war. In January 1915, the Central Committee of VMRO sent a “diplomatic” mission abroad, to see whether either alliance would be willing to arbitrate the issue of the contested territory or the status of the Slav inhabitants under Greek and Serbian rule.⁴⁵ Ultimately the Central Powers’ promise to grant all Macedonian territory and moderate financial credits brought Bulgaria into the war.⁴⁶ On September 6, 1915, Tsar Ferdinand, supported by the Liberal Party government, signed an alliance and military convention with the Central Powers.⁴⁷ With German assistance, the Bulgarian army mobilized for war.

Unlike the Balkan Wars, mobilization in 1915 saw the creation of a regular “Macedonian” army division raised from the inhabitants of the Pirin region, refugees from Greek- and Serbian-held Macedonia, and the existing cadres of

⁴⁴ Glavna direktsiya na statistika, *Statisticheski godishnik na Bulgarskoto Tsarstvo* (Sofia: Glavna direktsiya na statistika, 1924), 36-37.

⁴⁵ Petrov, 51.

⁴⁶ Hall, *Bulgaria's Road*, 285-308.

⁴⁷ Stavrianos, 561.

VMRO.⁴⁸ The 11th Macedonian-Adrianople Infantry Division included 18 infantry battalions, an artillery regiment, and attached cavalry squadrons. Nearly 35,000 Macedonians served in it, nearly 6,000 of these raised from the Pirin District that was now, as it had not been in the Balkan Wars, subject to the draft. A further 11,000 from Pirin would serve in other army units, such as the Planinska (Mountain) Division.⁴⁹ Also unlike the Balkan Wars, the 11th Macedonian-Adrianople Division was more effectively trained than the Macedonian-Adrianople Volunteers had been. The result was that the 11th Macedonian was used in combat rather than in occupation duties. They took part in the campaign against Serbia in 1915, fighting across Vardar (Serbian) Macedonia.⁵⁰ In addition, following its occupation of Vardar (Serbian) Macedonia in 1915 Bulgaria would recruit heavily from among the ranks of now-disbanded Serbian army units raised by forcible draft among the local population.⁵¹ 36,000 soldiers from Macedonia

⁴⁸ The inclusion of refugees also served political goals. The 11th Division was intended to demonstrate that Slav Macedonians outside Bulgaria were willing to fight against Greece and Serbia.

⁴⁹ Petrov gives a figure of 148,000 “Macedonian Bulgarians” out of 900,000 mobilized: this figure likely includes all Bulgarian citizens who claimed Macedonian antecedents. Dimitar Minchev suggests a figure of 134,000, including 17,000 from Pirin; see Petrov, 53, Dimitar Minchev, *Uchastieto na naselenieto ot Makedoniia v bulgarskata armiya prez Purvata svetovna voina, 1914-1918 g.* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Otbranata “Sv. Georgi Pobdonosets, 1994),

⁵⁰ Dimitar Minchev, “Bulgarskite ot makedoniia i armiite na Serbiia, Grtsiia i Bulgariia (1915-1918), *Istoricheski Preled* 45:5 (1989).

⁵¹ In 1914-1915, Serbia ordered the mobilization of 60,000 men of military age in Vardar; 44,500 responded, while 11,000 fled to Bulgaria. See Minchev, *Uchastieto na naselenieto ot Makedoniia, 1.*

who had been initially drafted into the Serbian army in 1914 subsequently served in the Bulgarian army.⁵²

Following the defeat of Serbia in 1915, Bulgaria's active participation in the war was limited to the occupation/liberation of Vardar Macedonia and to securing defensive lines in Aegean Macedonia. Substantial French and British forces landed in Salonika in October 1915 with the intention of aiding Serbia. Although the expeditionary force's own disconnected organization and the Greek government's disunity prevented it from rendering timely assistance, the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force remained in Salonika for the rest of the war. A limited campaign in 1916 pushed Bulgarian lines back near Seres and a joint Serbian and French force recaptured Bitola in 1917. But a major campaign was delayed until mid-1918.⁵³

If the population of Pirin saw no conflict within the region's borders and witnessed only relatively stalemate on the Salonika Front between late 1915 and early 1918, it retained a sense of wartime struggle. Pirin's location made it crucial to the Bulgarian government's efforts to maintain supplies and move troops to the Salonika front and to provide a defensive frontier. As the months passed into years, the Bulgarian state expanded its power to meet wartime needs. Economic

⁵² This figure includes former prisoners of war in Austria-Hungary who were released to the Bulgarian Army. Minchev, 25.

⁵³ Still the best introduction to the campaign is Alan Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965). For a Bulgarian perspective, see Georgi Markov, *Goliamata voina i Bulgarskata strazha mezdu Sredna Evropa I Orienta, 1916-1919 g.* (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. marin Drinov," 2006), 18, 121.

requisitioning extended across the country, Pirin now included.⁵⁴ So, too, did “cultural requisitioning.” The government sought to construct a “cultural policy” that would reinforce and support its efforts.⁵⁵ This included encouraging books and articles that supported Bulgaria’s claims on the entirety of the Macedonian lands.⁵⁶ Correspondingly, such measures gradually reduced Pirin’s autonomy, with VMRO suffering in particular. Yane Sandanski, the most autonomist-minded of the movement’s leaders, was assassinated by rivals in 1915 shortly before Bulgaria’s entry into the war.⁵⁷ After 1915, the movement was effectively co-opted into the Bulgarian war effort, with members either recalled to service in the army or drafted into military or government service.⁵⁸ The Bulgarian army recalled officers such as Aleksandur Protopetrov and Todor Aleksandrov (born in

⁵⁴ See Ljuben Berov, “The Bulgarian Economy During World War I,” 170-183. Bela K. Király, Nádor F. Dreisziger, Albert A. Nofi, eds., *East Central European Society in World War I* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁵⁵ Rumiana Koneva, *Goliama sreshta na bulgarskakiia narod: Kulturata i predizvikatelstvata na voinite 1912-1918 g.* (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov,” 1995), 17-40, 61-62.

⁵⁶ Velichko Georgiev, *Bulgarskata intelligenzia i natsionanlanata kauza v purvata svetovna voina: Suiozut na bulgarskite ucheni, pisateli i hudozhnitsi (1917-1918 g.)* (Sofia: Makedonski nauchni institut, 2000), 53-75.

⁵⁷ Sandanski’s death remains a point of historiographical dispute. Historians in Communist Bulgaria and Macedonia argued that his death was planned by the Bulgarian government, which disliked his (claimed) Socialist beliefs or his reputed involvement in a plot to assassinate Tsar Ferdinand. The topic still awaits a fresh re-evaluation by scholars, but arguably the ongoing series of assassination and counter-assassination between the rival wings of the organization played a predominant role. Favorable Communist portrayals of Sandanski have now resulted in a contemporary ambivalence regarding his historical role in Bulgaria. On this, see James Frusetta, “Divided Heroes, Common Claims: IMRO Between Macedonia and Bulgaria,” in John Lampe and Mark Mazower, eds., *Ideologies and National Identities: the Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 110-130.

⁵⁸ Purchlichev, 106-107.

Shtip) who had left the army to become leaders of *cheti* (Protogerov and Aleksandrov having emerged as leaders in the right wing of the movement by 1910). Dimitur Vlahov, an ideologue of the movement's left wing and later leader of VMRO's postwar communist wing, accepted a position in the Bulgarian administration over Kosovo in 1915. Their wartime experience would be put to good use in the interwar period, as we shall see in Chapter Five. Protogerov and Aleksandrov, who both served as generals during the war and would assume control over VMRO in 1918, were particularly affected by the experience of serving within the rigid wartime hierarchy of the Bulgarian army.⁵⁹ The larger Bulgarian war effort absorbed and transformed both VMRO and Pirin.

By 1918 three exhausting years of mobilization in a war economy and the defense of the Salonika Front in Aegean Macedonia sapped Bulgaria's economic health, political morale and military strength. The major Entente campaign unleashed that August succeeded in shattering Bulgarian lines — and with it, the Bulgarian government. French, British, Serbian and Greek forces broke through on the Salonika Front over September 14-26, threatening an advance into Pirin Macedonia and Kiustendil to the north. The Bulgarian government called for an armistice on September 28, 1918, and asked to begin peace talks. The defeat, compounded with the privations of the First World War became another "national catastrophe," as the 1913 defeat in the Second Balkan War was already remembered. The resulting social upheaval continued the sense of crisis and conflict into the next decade.

⁵⁹ On this, see Todor Aleksandrov, *Dnevnik i korespondentsia ot purvata svetova voina, 1915-1918 g.* (Stara Zagora: Izdatelstvo "Znanie" OOD, n.d.), 24.

The Shared Experience of Suffering

Bulgaria's participation in the three wars of 1912-1918 came at devastating cost. At the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919, Bulgaria was assessed reparations totaling 2.25 billion gold francs, at 5 percent annual interest. This figure was twice the Bulgarian national income of 1911, although payable over 60 years. The initial required payment of 105 million francs prompted the



government to renege on war debts and further devalue the leva, which fell to 3 percent of its pre-war parity with the gold franc.⁶⁰ Bulgaria faced the further loss of the Strumitsa *okoliia* to the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (hereafter, referred to as the Yugoslav Kingdom), and the loss of Western Thrace to Greece. The present borders of Pirin, Vardar and Aegean Macedonia were now established. Bulgaria retained some 10 percent of Macedonia, the Yugoslav

⁶⁰ Dimitur Kosev, *Vunshnata politika na bulgariya pri upravlenieto na Andrei Lyapchev, 1926-1931* (Sofia: Iz-vo "Prof. Marin Drinov, 1995).

Kingdom 38 percent, and Greece 52 percent (see Figure 9 and Figure 10, next page).⁶¹

Figure 10
Bulgarian Administrative Borders, 1923
The Petrich Department (Pirin) following the loss of Strumitsa
after the First World War



Based on Bulgarskata akademiia na naukite: Geografski institut, *Atlas Narodna Republika Bulgaria* (Sofia: Glavno upravlenie po geodeziia i kartografiiia pri ministerstvoto na akrhitektura i blagoustroistvoto, 1973), 7.

The Bulgarian “home front” saw considerable wartime privation in economic terms. The Balkan Wars alone resulted in state expenditures of some 1.3 billion francs, with a roughly equal additional debt (even after German assistance) for the First World War.⁶² Despite some attempts to regularize and nationalize the

⁶¹ Elena Statelova, *Istoriia na Nova bulgariia, 1878-1944*. (Sofia: Izdatelska kushta Anubis, 1999), 337-338; Stefan Radulov, “Makedonksiiat I trakiiskiiat vupros na Parizhkata mirna konferentsiia, 1919 g.,” in Dobrin Michev, ed., *Osvoboditelnite borbi sled purvata svetovna voina, 1919-1944* (Sofia: Macedonski nauchen institut and Bulgarskata akademiiia na naukite, 2003); Rothschild, 326. Given the short duration of Strumitsa’s inclusion in Bulgaria and its previous position in the Monastir *vilayet*, I do not treat it here as a part of Pirin.

⁶² Hall, *Balkan Wars*, 138; Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 955.

economy, industrial and agricultural production declined during the war due to the transfer of labor to the front. The economic infrastructure was severely overreached, particularly the rail network. Blockade of its Aegean coastline by the British navy and the needs of the Central Powers meant Bulgaria was unable to obtain replacement parts for imported machinery. A lack of credit hurt agriculture, and by 1919 the numbers of Bulgarian livestock and farm machinery had fallen by a third from the 1915 level.⁶³ Extensive food rationing had been imposed during the war, due not simply to diminished production but because of the extensive requisitioning by Austrian and German agents and soldiers in the field. The inflation rate doubled in the last year of the war, far exceeding the increase in wages.⁶⁴ Food shortages, combined with wartime pressures, weakened the population so that cholera and typhus epidemics swept the country. Then the great influenza epidemic of 1918 left some 150,000 civilians dead in its wake.

In Pirin, comparable losses came atop of the damages of the Balkan Wars, both of which had been fought across the province. Some 112,000 refugees had poured into Bulgaria in 1913 through Pirin.⁶⁵ Most had fled the destruction of towns such as Kukush and Serres in what became Greek or Serbian territory. But the fighting in 1913 had also done significant damage to Pirin, with Melnik and Gorna Dzhumaia suffering in particular.⁶⁶ VMRO

⁶³ Berov, 170-183.

⁶⁴ Strachan, 955.

⁶⁵ Todorovski, 86-87.

⁶⁶ Ivan Katarjiev, ed., *Predavnitsite na Makedonskoto delo* (TsK na VMRO(Ob)) (Skopje: Kultura: 1983), 76-78.

established close links with a number of these refugee groups, championing their cause to the Bulgarian government.⁶⁷ The Bulgarian government had begun efforts in 1913 to rebuild Pirin's damaged towns and villages and spur agricultural development, but reconstruction was far from finished when conflict began again in 1915.⁶⁸

Bad as the economic losses had been, the military losses were worse. Roughly 32,000 were killed in combat and 34,000 by disease with 110,000 wounded in the two Balkan Wars. A further 101,224 dead and 144,026 wounded followed in the First World War.⁶⁹ Nearly one in five adult males between the ages of 20 and 50 was killed between 1912 and 1918. The Macedonian Volunteer and 12th Macedonian Division's own casualties reached this level; MOO alone suffered 720 dead and 3,300 wounded and missing in the Balkan Wars. In addition to the military casualties, a significant number of civilians were displaced or driven from their homes. Defeat in 1918 resulted in a new wave of refugees (many of whom, having fled in 1913, returned to homes in Vardar over 1915-1918).⁷⁰

Nearly 20,000 refugees in all would settle in Pirin, the second largest total in absolute numbers in Bulgaria. Many sought consciously to stay near Aegean

⁶⁷ Matov, 141-142.

⁶⁸ Hadzhinikolov, Veselin, et. al., *Istoriia na Blagoevgradskata okruzhna organizatsiia na BKP* (Sofia: Partzdat, 1979), 62-63.

⁶⁹ Hall, 135 (for Balkan Wars) and Rothschild, 325. There is substantial disparity in casualty figures, however. Rothschild, 325, gives a figure of 53,825 killed and wounded in the Balkan Wars, and Vachkov gives a figure of 82,574 killed and 69,673 wounded in the two wars.

⁷⁰ Over 1913-1920, the total number of refugees reached 175,542 according to the Bulgarian census of 1920. However, some of these individuals had been refugees in both 1912-13 and 1918. See TsDA, fond 176, opis 5, a.e. 480, l. 15.

and Vardar Macedonia, hoping to return to their home towns and villages.⁷¹ That this sacrifice had been made apparently in vain added to widespread discontent with the existing political parties. So did woeful living conditions. Tens of thousands of refugees were left without adequate shelter in the winter of 1918 or were forced to sleep in livestock pens or barns.⁷²

These losses helped to shape both a “narrative of Bulgarian suffering” and a “narrative of Macedonian suffering.” The former reflected a broad transformation and radicalization within Bulgarian society. The effect of the war had been to expose a significant number of Bulgarians to the horrors of warfare. But the war also stoked a sense of anger and radicalism that would polarize post-war politics.⁷³ The Macedonian narrative stressed the loss of Vardar and Aegean lands plus the perceived cruelty inflicted by the rival neighbor states. Repression now continued across the border in both Vardar and Aegean Macedonia. The Yugoslav Kingdom and Greece now enacted new administrative measures to eliminate political dissent and ethnic separatism.⁷⁴ Refugee organizations emerging in Bulgaria after 1918 fostered this narrative of suffering, which proved an effective rallying cry. The sheer number of immigrants from the Macedonian

⁷¹ Only Burgas had a larger number of refugees. Georgi Dimitrov, *Nastaniavane i ozemliavane na bulgarskite bezhantsi, 1919-1939* (Blagoevgrad: n.p., 1985).

⁷² The result was a lingering feeling of animosity between refugees and the government's Refugee Settlement Commission; see TsDA, fond 176, opis 4, a.e. 795, l 1-2.

⁷³ Radulov, 13-14. See the arguments in Ivan Elenkov, *Rodno i diasno* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “LIK,” 1998), particularly 32-39; also see Koneva, 148-162, on the cultural impact of the war.

⁷⁴ Petrov, 67-88, presents the Bulgarian view. A recent Serbian view reassessing interwar policy in Vardar Macedonia is Vladan Ivanović, *Jugoslovenska država i južna Srbija, 1918-1929* (Beograd: INIS, 2002), particularly 147-226. My thanks to Nadja Duhaček for her assistance with the Serbian-language text.

lands made such organizations politically powerful and most maintained significant ties in membership to the pre-war paramilitary organizations.⁷⁵ A considerable number of these refugees, particularly from Greece, subsequently resettled in Pirin, as will be addressed in Chapter Five.⁷⁶

Crucial to the creation of this narrative was the conduct of the various combatants during the Balkan Wars. All of the armies engaged during the two wars had histories of attacking civilian populations and of mistreating prisoners. While the Bulgarian army and local *cheti* committed atrocities themselves,⁷⁷ Bulgarian overextension and then the continued retreats of the Second Balkan War meant that Greek and Serbian forces (sometimes allied with local Muslims) had more frequent opportunities to attack civilians. For Macedonia as a whole, there are numerous accounts of atrocities carried out against civilians, particularly in Aegean Macedonia. The Greek offensive through Pirin during the Second Balkan War resulted in widespread devastation. In the words of one Greek soldier, "...from Serres to the frontier, we have burnt all the Bulgarian villages."⁷⁸ Both armies reportedly killed prisoners and the wounded, Greek soldiers privately confessed to attacking local Slav inhabitants. Accounts of atrocities in Pirin were unusually detailed, as illustrated not only by subsequent

⁷⁵ Aleksander Grebenarov and Trendafil Mitev, "Bezhanskite i emigrantskite organizatsii na makedonskite i trakiiski bulgari (1919-1924 g.)," in Michev, 47-51.

⁷⁶ Dimitur Tiulekov, *Obrechено родолюбие: VMRO v Pirinsko, 1919-1934* (Blagoevgrad: Makedonski nauchen institut, 2001), 10.

⁷⁷ For example, both pogroms and organized executions of local Muslim and Greeks in Strumitsa, Kukush and Serres, accompanied by rape, pillage and extortion. See Carnegie Endowment, *The Other Balkan Wars* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993), 73-75, 99.

⁷⁸ Carnegie Endowment, 308.

testimony made to the Carnegie Commission but also from Greek soldiers' mail home seized by the Bulgarian army from a Greek supply train. Both victims and soldiers detailed repeated incidents of rape, looting, and the burning of villages. The Greek letters further recorded the murder of prisoners of war and massacres of refugees.⁷⁹ The scope of the destruction is summarized in a list, stated to be incomplete, of 42 Pirin villages burned by the Greek army.⁸⁰ The shared experience of suffering in both Pirin and the pre-1912 Bulgarian lands created some sense of unity.

The Shared Experience of Combat

A shared feeling of comradeship paralleled this shared feeling of loss. The inhabitants of Pirin, serving as volunteers or drafted, fought alongside the Bulgarian army. The cohesive effect of service in VMRO *cheti*, the MOO Corps and the 12th Macedonian Division emerges from the records of the veterans units formed during the interwar period. This can be seen in the membership records for the *Makedono-Odrinsko opulchensko druzhestvo*: (Macedonian-Adrianople Volunteers Society).⁸¹ The Volunteers Society was not founded until 1934, partially through government initiatives in Pirin as detailed in Chapter Six. The

⁷⁹ Selected soldiers' letters are translated and reproduced by the Carnegie Commission: see Carnegie, 307-314. Particularly striking is the statement of Spiliotopoulos Philippos regarding the murder of prisoners of war (*ibid.*, 307-308), and of E.N. Loghaidis, noting "...refugees from Koukouch and Lahna. The guns mowed them down on the road." (*ibid.*, 313).

⁸⁰ Carnegie, 314-316. The villages are individually named; Sixteen in the Melnik district and fourteen in the Petrich district, both in southern Pirin, but seven villages in the Nevrokop district (as well as part of the town of Nevrokop itself), four in the Gorna Dzhumaia district and one in the Razlog district were also burned.

⁸¹ ODAB, Fond 314K, opis 4, a.e. 1-148.

membership applications required the candidate to state birthplace, occupation, birth year, education and army service, allowing for a reasonable survey to be made of Society's composition.⁸² The overall picture is one of an organization united across social boundaries.

The applications suggest, unsurprisingly, that the veterans were effectively drawn from the same generation — this one coming after the 1890s generation that fought the Ilinden Uprising. Members still ranged broadly in age, the youngest being 14 at the outbreak of the First Balkan War (and 36 when the society was founded), and the oldest 56 at the outbreak of the war (78 in 1934). But even taking casualties during the war and deaths due to old age into consideration, the age distribution breaks down into a much narrower pattern: 58 percent of the Society's members had been born between 1882 and 1892. They were thus 20 to 29 years old in 1912 (32 to 44 in 1934).⁸³ Nearly 11 percent of the total membership was born in 1882 alone, and more members were born each year between 1880 and 1890 than any year before or after. Despite the presence of older veterans (many of whom had previously fought with VMRO) and younger volunteers, the Volunteers' Society reflects the fact that the Macedonian struggle was in many ways a “generational event.”

⁸² Some of the applications are partially incomplete: for example, a.e. 80, the application membership for Dimitur Donev Radiech, lists no date of birth while listing the remaining information—and the numbers used here correspondingly vary slightly.

⁸³ With regards to the remaining membership, based on the total applications included in the *fond*, eleven percent had been born in or before 1872 (more than 40 years old in 1912), twenty-seven percent were born over 1873-1881 (31 to 39 years old in 1912), and only nine percent were born between 1883 to 1898 (14 to 19).

More suggestive of a yet uncertain national consciousness in the region is the information regarding birthplace and social background. State-sponsored mobilization proved to be a unifying force across social boundaries. Service in the wars crossed the rural-urban divide of the pre-1912 period, even though 83 percent of the membership listed a village as their place of origin. Far more significant is the distribution by birthplace. Although 46 percent were born in the Pirin region, 28 percent were immigrants from Aegean Macedonia and 21 percent from Vardar Macedonia.⁸⁴ No single locality predominated; the largest concentrations were of eight immigrants from the town of Kukush (in Aegean Macedonia), four immigrants from Strumitsa (part of Pirin between 1913-1918), three natives of the town of Gorna Dzhumaia and three natives of the nearby village of Razdezh. In terms of education, only two of the applicants had attended *gymnasium* or university. But 37 of 120 applicants had completed secondary school, with a further 30 recording some secondary education. Twelve (generally older) stated that they were either illiterate, “unschooled,” or had no formal education.⁸⁵ The armed struggle was a cohesive experience across the Macedonian lands, and a unifying event that brought immigrants and the Pirin-born together after the war. These were also men from a broadly similar social background, most of whom lacked close pre-war educational or urban exposure to a Bulgarian national consciousness. Their service in the Bulgarian army during

⁸⁴ In addition, one listed a birthplace in northern Bulgaria and two listed birthplaces in Serbia. Such loss of birthplace among immigrant soldiers reflects the link with the refugee movement in encouraging a broad sense of “Macedonian” unity, through shared suffering.

⁸⁵ Information from applications in ODAB, Fond 314K, opis 4, a.e. 1-148.

the war years of 1915-1918 was thus their first prolonged experience with Sofia's state- and nation-building efforts. While educated elites had embraced the national cause in the past, the rural majority now embraced it during the war years.⁸⁶

This snapshot of men who served in the Volunteers and the 12th Macedonian infantry portrays both units as inclusive bodies that brought disparate men together from throughout the Macedonia lands. In 1912, much of Macedonia was relatively isolated. Although a small number of Macedonians were able to obtain foreign educations, and certain regions (such as the Salonika hinterland, or the Salonika-Veles-Skopje-Belgrade train corridor) were more open to the outside world, the majority of the Macedonian *vilayets* remained relatively closed both by Ottoman policies and by geographic isolation.

Pirin was connected to Bulgaria only by a road link between Dupnitsa and Gorna Dzhumaia, and the region was internally served by a road link that followed the Struma river south from Gorrna Dzhumaia. For villages isolated from each other, the mobilizing experience of struggle through VMRO, MOO and the 12th Infantry created a unifying consciousness of comradeship that the Bulgarian state, defeated both in 1913 and 1918, shared — but failed to capture for itself alone. This question of a yet divided national consciousness would be recast in

⁸⁶ This can be contrasted with the situation in post-war Greece, which lacked a similar “integrative event” to unite native Greeks and immigrants from Bulgaria and Asia Minor. It also suggests that educated émigrés from Macedonia were more likely to settle in Sofia, Plovdiv, Ruse or other cities in Bulgaria, suggesting the need for additional research on the social divisions between émigré settlement in Bulgaria.

1918-1923, when the movement demanded separate recognition in the context of domestic civil upheaval.

Struggle at Home: the Macedonian Movement and Aleksander Stamboliiski

In the closing stages of the First World War, morale in the Bulgarian army collapsed in the face of the Entente offensive on the Salonika Front. Worse, signs of discontent in the army heralded the possibility of revolution.⁸⁷ Two regiments mutinied on September 16, and revolutionary Soviets were established in three towns on September 23. Agitation culminated with the outbreak of the Radomir Rebellion on September 27. Aleksandar Stamboliiski, leader of the *Bulgarski Zemedelski Naroden Siuoz* (BZNS, or Bulgarian Agricultural National Union) and the most prominent figure in the opposition to the war, now joined the rebellious army units in Radomir and demanded political change in the country

Although army units loyal to the government quickly dispersed the Radomir Rebellion and forced Stamboliiski into hiding, the old political order was now clearly in retreat. Tsar Ferdinand abdicated on October 4, 1918, giving way to his son Boris III. By the summer of 1919, domestic unrest forced Boris to call for new elections. Stamboliiski, now pardoned for his part in the 1918 army mutinies, entered the election at the head of the Agrarian Union. It won a plurality of votes that allowed him to take power as prime minister in a coalition with left-wing parties (although not including the Bulgarian Communist Party). A second election, in March 1920, brought the BZNS sufficient seats in parliament for

⁸⁷ Statelova, 324-325.

Stamboliiski to dispense with the coalition and undertake a radical shift in domestic and foreign policy. Characterizing the Neiully treaty as a “corpse drowning the entire Bulgarian nation in mourning,”⁸⁸ Stamboliiski sought a foreign policy of accommodation with the Yugoslav Kingdom and Greece.

In domestic policy, Stamboliiski sought nothing less than the complete reorientation of Bulgarian administration, politics and economics to serve the needs and desires of Bulgaria’s peasant majority. His first priority was however to secure enough domestic and international stability to carry out necessary reforms. Stamboliiski sought not just to reduce the past influence of the Macedonian paramilitary movement within Bulgaria. He proved willing to accept the surrender of the “lost Macedonian lands” to Greece and the Yugoslav Kingdom in return for cooperation with Athens and Belgrade in reducing Bulgarian reparations and ending Bulgaria’s diplomatic isolation in the region. This brought him into direct conflict with a reorganized and still armed Macedonian paramilitary movement.⁸⁹

As part of the Bulgarian army, the 12th Macedonian Division had been demobilized in 1918 at Gorna Dzhumaia, in Pirin. It was from among these veterans that now demobilized Bulgarian army Generals Todor Aleksandrov and Aleksandar Protopetrov began to recruit men to re-found VMRO, only weeks after

⁸⁸ Aleksandur Samboliiski, “Speech to the Parliamentary group of the Agrarian Party,” September 30, 1919, in Voinov, *Documents*, 418.

⁸⁹ Georgi Markov, *Kambanite biyat sami*, reprinted in *Pokusheniiia, nasilie i politika v Bulgariia, 1878-1947* (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 2003), 157-159.

the war ended.⁹⁰ The organization of a new VMRO had begun barely a month after Bulgaria left the war with an eye to shaping post-war policy on the lost lands of Vardar and Aegean Macedonia.⁹¹ The formation of a new organization, and of armed *cheti*, accelerated in 1919 when the terms of the Neuilly Treaty became known.⁹² The treaty lead as well to open cooperation with émigré groups within Bulgaria. Decrying efforts by the governments of Greece and Yugoslav Kingdom to “Hellenize” and “Serbianize” the inhabitants of Aegean and Vardar Macedonia, Aleksandrov launched a new guerilla campaign.⁹³

In loose cooperation with émigré and refugee groups, VMRO also began to campaign politically for the creation of an “autonomous” Macedonia that would re-unify the Macedonian territories now split between Bulgaria, Greece and the newly-founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This program reflected an arguably accurate assessment of the limited power and willingness of the Bulgarian state to champion the Macedonian cause after the First World War. VMRO now called for a return to the strategy of seeking autonomy. In the short run, the organization appealed to the League of Nations that Vardar, Pirin and

⁹⁰ Konstadin Paleshutski, *Makedonskoto osvoboditelno dvizhenie sled purvata svetovna voina, 1918-124* (Sofia: Iz-do na Bulgarskata akademiiia na naukite, 1993), 10.

⁹¹ Kostadin Paleshutski, *Makedonskoto osvoboditelno dvizhenie sled purvata svetovna voina, 1918-1924* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgaskata akeademiia na naukite, 1993), 10-11.

⁹² Dimitur Gotsev, “Vuzobnoviavane, tseli i deinost na VMRO, 1919-1924 g.),” in Michev, 93-94. VMRO petitioned the Paris Peace conference directly requesting representation of “Macedonian Bulgarians” at the conference: see Aleksander Protogerov and Todor Alexandrov, “Memorandum to the Paris Conference,” March 1, 1919, in Voinov, *Documents 402-408*.

⁹³ Gotsev, 97, 99-102.

Aegean Macedonia be unified and granted autonomy under a mandate.⁹⁴ One group of émigrés from Macedonia even approached the United States to ask if it would be willing to assume a mandate over Macedonia and Thrace.⁹⁵ Ultimately, however, it was the movement's own growing paramilitary power that would enable it, as Chapter Five details, to rule Pirin autonomously.

Aleksandrov was able to raise an army of 9,100 men between 1919 and 1923, concentrated in Gorna Dzhumaia (3,000), Petrich (2,100) and Nevrokop (1,800). A further 1,675 guerillas operated in Vardar Macedonia, with aid and assistance smuggled across the border.⁹⁶ Solicitations from the Macedonian émigré community in Bulgaria and “taxes” requisitioned by VMRO in Pirin financed the process. All of this recalled the prewar experience of military mobilization. But Aleksandrov’s own experience in a military hierarchy between 1912-1918, as noted above, led him to reform VMRO’s organization. Before 1912, the mobilization of *cheti* by locality encouraged the formation of loose, geographically-based “groups.” The new VMRO arguably borrowed from Aleksandrov’s military service in the Bulgarian army to create regular formations (while retaining the name *cheta*) and centralized command.⁹⁷ What distinguishing

⁹⁴ Paleshutski, *Makedonskoto osvoboditelno*, 42-43.

⁹⁵ Mihailo Minoski, *Soedinetite Amerikanski Drzhavi i Makedonija, 1869-1919* (Skopje: Matitsa Makedonska, 1994), 79.

⁹⁶ Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia. Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 322-323.

⁹⁷ Tiulekov, 16, notes the erosion of the previous boundaries. In practical terms, *cheti* in Vardar and Aegean Macedonia retained much of their autonomy. But groups operating from regular bases in Pirin could be brought under more control.

this postwar mobilization was not only its basing *inside* Bulgaria,⁹⁸ but how it drew upon the experience of service with and within the Bulgarian Army over 1912-1918.

As early as November 1918, Stamboliiksi had endorsed the arrest of leaders of the Macedonian paramilitary and political organizations. After taking power, he consistently tried to suppress VMRO, perceiving the movement as a direct threat to the stability of the government. In 1921 Stamboliiski's government attempted to disarm the growing paramilitary wing of VMRO forcibly, leading to open conflict.⁹⁹ Minister for War Alexander Dimitrov offered a reward for the death or capture of VMRO leaders and embarked on a purge of VMRO sympathizers from the army and border guards. As government forces attempted to arrest or eliminate VMRO members, VMRO turned to terrorist acts against the government. Dimitrov himself was ambushed on October 22 and, along with two companions, was shot and then hacked to death by bayonets.¹⁰⁰

Over 1921 and 1923, VMRO was effectively able to undermine and assume the role of local government in Pirin, primarily because of the profound military weakness of Stamboliiski's regime.¹⁰¹ VMRO, at its height, could boast of over 9,000 *komitadzhii*; government forces, in turn, had been limited by the

⁹⁸ This is similar to the Supremacist's tendency, before 1904, to stage raids out of Bulgaria. Aleksandrov, however, operated on much greater scale. In addition, he took the step of "negotiating" for foreign bases; in 1920, VMRO raided out of bases in Albania, organized in cooperation with the ongoing Albanian rebellion against the Yugoslav Kingdom in Kosovo. On the later point, see Banac, 322n; also Katajriev, *Istorija na makedonskiot narod*, 288-292.

⁹⁹ Tiulekov, 31-34; see also Markov, 162-163.

¹⁰⁰ Paleshutski, *Makedonskoto osvoboditelno dvizhenie*, 127-129.

¹⁰¹ Statelova suggests that VMRO was already establishing a "state within a state" in this period: Statelova, 390.

Treaty of Neuilly to 20,000 soldiers and a combined force of gendarmes, border guards and municipal police forces not to exceed 10,000.¹⁰² Much of this armed force in turn had previously been sympathetic to VMRO's aims, and were alarmed by Stamboliiski's use of his own paramilitary force, the Orange Guard (*Oranzheva gvardiia*), and his organizing of a draft to provide "labor battalions" outside of the army's control.¹⁰³ Arguably, Bulgarian government forces under Stamboliiski's command were not only insufficient in number to confront VMRO but unwilling to do so.

Internationally, the increasing power of VMRO threatened to destabilize Bulgaria's relations with Serbia and Greece as *cheti* raided into both countries, assassinating local officials and ambushing police and soldiers. In June 1922 a joint note from Greece, Romania and the Yugoslav Kingdom warned Stamboliiski that unless Bulgaria acted to suppress VMRO, they would occupy Bulgaria and suppress the paramilitary movement directly.¹⁰⁴ The situation worsened on September 4, 1922, when VMRO not only dispatched 1,000 *komitadzhii* on a raid into Vardar Macedonia, but took over the town of Kiustendil within Bulgaria. This

¹⁰² See Articles 66 and 69 of the Treaty of Neuilly. "Treaty of Peace Between the Allied and Associated Powers and Bulgaria, and Protocol and Declaration signed at Neuilly-sur-Seine, 27 November 1919" *World War I Document Archive*, Brigham Young University Library, 23 August 2006 <<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1918p/neuilly.html>>.

¹⁰³ Great Britain and France intervened and ordered Stamboliiski to disband the labor corps, finding it to be a means of circumventing the Treaty of Neuilly's restrictions on the size of the Bulgarian army. In fact, the post-1923 government would adopt the concept to do exactly that.

¹⁰⁴ Bell, 201.

forcible occupation was a direct challenge to the state authority of the Stamboliiski regime¹⁰⁵

In 1923, Stamboliiski attempted to solve the problem of hostile neighboring states and a hostile paramilitary group at home simultaneously. He signed Treaty of Niš with the Yugoslav Kingdom in order to create a common security border between the two states. Its terms provided for a 200 meter cleared zone, joint border patrols and mutual rights to pursue guerillas across the border. Stamboliiski also announced a new purge to remove VMRO-sympathizers from the government, as well as the creation of a special police force to eliminate VMRO.¹⁰⁶

Wider, political opposition to Stamboliiski had already emerged, encouraged by his autocratic style of rule. In 1922, the Bulgarian right had coalesced into an opposition coalition, the National Alliance (*Natsionalen suiuz*). Stamboliiski responded by arresting its leadership. By mid-1923, the *Natsionalen suiuz*, the Military League (*Voenen suiuz*, a “non-political” party composed of Bulgarian army officers founded in 1919 to resist the Neuilly Treaty’s restrictions on the Bulgarian Army) came together with veterans groups and elements of the active Bulgarian army to form an underground conservative opposition to Stamboliiski. Negotiations were opened with VMRO in 1923 to include the organization — and its paramilitary wing — in a conspiracy against the regime.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Gotsev, “Vuzobnoviavane,” 103-104.

¹⁰⁶ On the stepped up campaign, see Gotsev, “Vuzobnoviavane,” 103-104; Bell, 203-204.

¹⁰⁷ Tiulekov, 23-24.

On June 11, 1923, military officers belonging to the Military League, VMRO members and “volunteers” from several veterans groups moved to take control of Sofia, the capital.¹⁰⁸ A mixed group seized Stamboliiski himself on June 13 and proceeded to torture him, stab him nearly sixty times and cut off his right hand (the hand which had signed the Treaty of Niš). A VMRO member finally decapitated him after the ordeal.¹⁰⁹ With Stamboliiski’s murder, VMRO forged a working partnership with the other groups in the *coup d’etat*. VMRO offered this not for reasons of political ideology, as a tactical alliance. The wartime years of frustrated struggle would now be transformed into open political control of the Pirin district within Bulgaria. And VMRO, eschewing public declarations of political ideology, now proved willing to work with any political grouping — not only the conservatives of the 1923 *coup* but, potentially, Communists and Fascists as well — to secure the support needed to advance its agenda of redrawing the borders of Macedonia along the lines it defined.

Conflict and Consciousness

The armed struggle of 1912-1923 transformed Pirin through its incorporation into a larger, longer struggle. The region’s participation in the Balkan and First World Wars and postwar internal conflict still left in place — arguably, even reinforced — two rival narratives of national consciousness, Macedonian and Bulgarian versions whose compatibility remained unsettled.

¹⁰⁸ On the coup, see Statelova, *Nova istorii*, 390-395. A relatively first-hand account of the conspiracy and coup is Aleksandur Tsankov, *Bulgariia v burno vreme: spomeni* (Sofia: Prozorets, 1998), 152-162.

¹⁰⁹ Bell, 234, 237-238.

These narratives were adopted in the subsequent interwar period by, respectively, those favoring local autonomy and those favoring integration into the Bulgarian state. VMRO, the Volunteers and the Macedonian Division had each fought distinctive campaigns during the wartime and immediate postwar periods which could be understood within a context that emphasized a broader Bulgarian interpretation or a narrative of a Macedonian struggle.

In a practical sense, the events of 1912-23 also transformed the loose paramilitary structure of VMRO into a more centralized organization. At the same time, however, these events revealed the continued existence of old fault lines, e.g., the continuance of “autonomist” and “unification” wings of the Macedonian movement. In the post-1923 period VMRO would embark on establishing its own administrative regime within the Pirin district that served to, as detailed in Chapter Five, outweigh the authority of the Bulgarian state itself. Yet in this period conflict within the movement also emerged clearly. Even as VMRO sought autonomy from the Bulgarian state to administer its own Pirin statelet, factions within VMRO sought their own autonomy from Aleksandrov’s centralizing leadership within the movement.

Chapter Five

A State Within a State: Pirin, 1923-1934

On October 22, 1925, advance units of the Greek 6th Division crossed the border into Pirin with orders to secure the frontier between Greece and Bulgaria. The remainder of the 3rd and 4th Corps mobilized to render support if necessary. An incident the week before between Bulgarian and Greek border guards had resulted in the fatal shooting of a Greek soldier and was the immediate trigger for the incursion. But it was the persistent cross-border raids by a revitalized Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (*Vutreshna Makedonska Revoliutsionna Organizatsiia*, or VMRO) that encouraged the Greek Ministry of War's decision to invade.

VMRO used its Pirin "state within a state" as a base for launching cross-border raids into Greece and the Yugoslav Kingdom. A successful Greek campaign could eliminate VMRO outright, destroy its ability to stage cross-border invasions or at least pressure the Bulgarian government to crackdown on the paramilitary.¹ In the following three days Greek forces occupied ten villages

¹ The Greek rationale for the incident remains controversial. James Barros, *The League of Nations and the Great Powers: The Greek-Bulgarian Incident of 1925* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), suggests the incursion was the result of accidental escalation following the initial incident. Georgi V. Dimtriov, *Izlozii i deistvitevnost* (Blagoevgrad: IK "Intelekt-A," 1996), argues the incursion was an

inside the border and penetrated to a depth of ten kilometers. Several hundred infantry, supported by artillery and observation aircraft, proceeded to lay siege to the town of Petrich, the provincial capital and headquarters of VMRO.

The Bulgarian government mobilized troops of the 7th Rila Division in response, dispatching them south to Petrich. An active defense had already been put in place, however. Nearly 450 *komitadzhii* of VMRO took up positions around and in the town, outnumbering the Bulgarian troops present. As the Greeks shelled and then assaulted the town, the Bulgarian government protested to the League of Nations. The League agreed to mediate, and on October 30 Greek troops began to withdraw back across the border; the combined losses of both sides were roughly 50 dead. International mediation brought Bulgaria a diplomatic victory, as the League found the Greek incursion illegal and levied a fine of some 24 million leva (equivalent to \$220,000 at the time). VMRO itself won a substantial propaganda victory for its defense of the city and subsequent role in rebuilding its damaged areas.²

The incident in 1925 highlights VMRO's predominant position in Pirin. From 1923 until 1934, VMRO provided a parallel organizational structure — "a state within a state" — that rivaled or surpassed that of the central government. From 1923 to 1934, successive central governments in Sofia chose not to

attempt to put pressure on the Bulgarian government, to force Sofia to restrict the activities of VMRO.

² On the role of VMRO, see TsDA fond 369K, opis 1, a.e. 722, I 39-45; my thanks to Anca Glont for her help with the text. An account by one of the participants favors VMRO's role in the incident; see Hristo Bratanov, *Sreshu gurtsite na Belasitsa i Struma (dnevnik na subitiia po intsidenta v Petrichko prez esenta na 1925 g.)* (Sofia: n.p., 1927).

dispute VMRO's influence and power within Pirin. Although the government was nominally sovereign, in fact the province gained the autonomy that local elites had demanded in the past. This represents a deviation from Charles Maier's European structural narrative for the continued expansion, strengthening and centralization of state power, as noted in Chapter One.³ For late-coming and weak Southeastern European states, their powers in the interwar period were indeed used to press for the extension of schooling, military service, the development of economic infrastructure and expanded state employment. The Bulgarian government had begun what Anthony Smith calls an "administrative mobilization" of the province in 1912, encouraging a national consciousness synonymous with the state.⁴ Now, however, VMRO supplanted the rule of Sofia and assumed control over this mobilization. VMRO's rule over the region allowed it, in cooperation with allied Macedonian organizations, to offer alternative narratives, symbols, myths and experiences, as discussed below.

These offerings reinforced a local consciousness already partially forged in the resistance efforts of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Aspects of identity normally state controlled were, instead, under local control. To be Bulgarian in Pirin between 1923-1934 was to be a Macedonian Bulgarian, to feel the influence of Macedonian organizations in daily life and to serve and be served by a local regime that was, for a decade, defined in practice

³ Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* 105:3 (June 2000), 808, 815, 820.

⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986), 157-161.

as a Macedonian state in Bulgaria. VMRO ruled Pirin; and it justified this rule by stressing its role as defender of not only of the inhabitants of Pirin. The 1925 incident demonstrated the organization's commitment and effectiveness to the Slav inhabitants of Aegean and Vardar Macedonia as well.

VMRO: Defending Macedonia

The three professed goals of the postwar VMRO were to assist Macedonian refugees settling in Bulgaria, to contest Greek and Serbian control over Aegean and Vardar Macedonia, and to encourage a political climate within Bulgaria receptive to the first two goals.⁵ Aleksandur Protopetrov, one of the three leaders of the Central Committee of VMRO in the immediate post-war period, argued that in pursuing these goals VMRO did not oppose the government, but served common interests.⁶ In other words, it undertook policies that the government *should* be carrying out. After all, its participation in the *coup* of 1923 had been to secure a government friendly to VMRO's goals.⁷

The assumption of control over Pirin in 1923 was justified as part of VMRO's struggle to liberate Aegean and Vardar Macedonia. Bases in the region were necessary to allow cross-border attacks into Greece and Yugoslavia. Moreover, VMRO could count upon some donations from the hundreds of

⁵ TsDA, fond 396, opis 2, a.e. 2, page 53.

⁶ Georgi Markov, *Kambanite biyat sami: nasilie i politika v Bulgariia, 1919-1947* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Ministerstvoto na otbranata "Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets," 1994), 229.

⁷ Konstantin Paleshutski, *Makedonskoto osvoboditelno dvizhenie sled purvata svetovna voina, 1918-1924* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata akademija na nukite, 1993), 174.

thousands of war refugees who settled postwar in Bulgaria and from the existing prewar émigré Macedonian community. But Pirin (as discussed below) provided an additional, steady source of financial support and recruitment that the organization could control directly to raise detachments and fund these forces. VMRO's "state within a state," was justified as an emergency measure necessary for the liberation of Macedonia. What it was not — at least initially — was a formal attempt to create an "autonomous" Macedonian region within Bulgaria such as many in the Seres group had anticipated before the Balkan Wars.⁸

The reinvigorated VMRO divided Pirin into military districts just as the pre-war organization had done, each district again hosting a number of *cheti* led by a *voivoda*. What was now different was a far more systematic organization. Formal structures for military training and inspection were created for the first time. Military inspectors began making regular reports for the organization's Central Committee. "Censuses" were taken at the local and village level, to assess the training of local *komitadzhii*, to inventory and inspect weapons, and to assess the effectiveness of officers and non-commissioned officers.⁹ Districts were divided into military sub-districts, each with their own local commanders. The Petrich district, for example, was divided into seven sub-districts with 62 *voivodi* and 449 *komitadzhii*.¹⁰ This allowed for better organization and training, as well as

⁸ The Federalist approach favored by the Seres group in VMRO was to argue for the creation of an autonomous Macedonia within the Ottoman Empire. Such proposals were also advanced, for Macedonian autonomy in any union with Bulgaria, and even suggestions for a "Balkan Union" that would have included all of Southeastern Europe.

⁹ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 80-81.

¹⁰ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 26, l. 5.

logistics — the Central Committee supplying cartridges, grenades and uniforms for the active guerillas.¹¹ These seven sub-districts also created the basis for further administrative efforts in Pirin.

Cheti were formed in preparation for carrying out armed incursions. As noted in Chapter Four, VMRO was already sending *cheti* into Vardar and Aegean Macedonia by 1920. These incursions were aimed at undermining Greek and Serbian rule over their respective Macedonian territories. Attacks on Serbian and Greek border guards, even military units, peaked in the mid-1920s. Such raids were serious enough to provoke the Greek incursion in 1925, and a second border conflict which occurred in 1931. The raids into Vardar Macedonia prompted the Yugoslav Kingdom in 1927 to close its border with Bulgaria in protest.¹² While such cross-border terrorist attacks achieved little in military terms, they affirmed VMRO's continuing and active role as defender of Macedonian rights in the face of the Bulgarian state's passivity.

In addition to supporting cross-border guerillas, VMRO took an active interest in forming local militias of the sort that rallied to Petrich's defense in 1925.¹³ These bands, too, were regularly inspected, armed and organized, and in much greater numbers than the active *chetnitsi*. The Petrich sub-district registered nearly 4,000 militia members, while Gorna Dzhumaia boasted over

¹¹ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 172-173. One purchase order in 1925, for example, included 30,000 Mannlicher cartridges, 500 bombs, 280 caps, 320 cloaks, 320 jackets, 320 pants, 400 *Kalui* and 400 *Tsurvuli*.

¹² Tiulekov, 147-148; Crampton 102.

¹³ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 208-211.

6,000 militiamen, compared to 523 active *chetnitsi* from the district.¹⁴ Such militias comprised up to the quarter of adult men in the district. To service and support this force, VMRO developed its own provincial administration, which a Bulgarian state constrained by crisis was not able to contest.

The Weak Central State: the Economic Crises of 1923-1934

As noted in Chapter Three, the Bulgarian state created in 1878 was highly centralized. The Bulgarian constitution stipulated a constitutional monarchy with a strong parliament (*Subranie*) elected by universal manhood suffrage. The Prince (Tsar from 1908) remained head of state, with the right to conduct “agreements with neighboring powers,” appoint ministers to the cabinet, suspend civil liberties and call elections.¹⁵ But the position of prime minister held substantial powers as did the cabinet, generally appointed from among the members of the *Subranie*. The crisis of 1919 weakened the position of the monarch, now Ferdinand’s 29-year-old son Boris, allowing the rise of Alexandur Stamboliiski as Chapter Four details. Following his overthrow in 1923, political power would be concentrated in the hands of the political elite centered in Sofia (including Tsar Boris) as it had been before 1918.¹⁶

¹⁴ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 24, l. 3-6.

¹⁵ Tatiana Kostadinova, *Bulgaria 1879-1946: The Challenge of Choice* (Boulder: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1995), 5-20.

¹⁶ Stanley Payne terms it a “nineteenth-century-style oligarchic parliamentary regime.” This is particularly apt, since the goal of the 1923 coup had been to remove the influence of Bulgaria’s only mass political movement, the Agrarians, and to re-install rule by a small clique of political elites. Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 326.

The ministries maintained firm control over the day-to-day matters of the government, with their central bureaucracies in Sofia directing officials in the rest of the country.¹⁷ Provincial offices were merely the extensions of the central authorities; regional and local governments lacked autonomous or independent jurisdiction. The 1879 Veliko Turnovo Constitution had reserved considerable powers of self-government for the provinces, but these measures (among others) were already undermined by the 1880s.¹⁸

Several ministries were particularly important. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health (*Ministerstvoto na vutreshnite raboti i narodnoto zdраве*, or MVRNZ) controlled the police, domestic intelligence and the monitoring of national and local political affairs and administration.¹⁹ The Ministry of Education (*Ministerstvoto na obrazovanieto*, or MO) was a centralized body that set and inspected the curricula of local schools.²⁰ The Ministry of Trade and Agriculture (*Ministerstvoto na turgoviata i zemedeliето*, or MTZ) held a monopoly on the sale of certain goods (for tax purposes). From Stamboliiski's regime forward, it also maintained a considerable staff of agronomists and veterinarians

¹⁷ See Rumen Daskalov, *Bulgarskoto obshtestvo, 1878-1939: Tom I, Durzhava, politika, ikonomika* (Sofia: IK Gutenberg, 2005), 53.

¹⁸ Article 3 of the Constitution specifies this. “Konstitutsiia na Bulgarskoto kniazhestvo,” in Vasil Giozelev, *Bulgarskata durzhavnost v aktove i dokumenti* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Nauka i Izkustvo,” 1981), 220. For an analysis, see Daskalov, 60-61.

¹⁹ Ibid., 55. In 1925, the MVRNZ was reorganized and three different police structures were created: the Administrative Police, Criminal Police and Public Security Police. The latter were a secret political police, monitoring the Agrarian and Communist parties — and, after 1934, would be used to monitor the activities of former VMRO members.

²⁰ Hiring and funding were generally under the purview of the municipal or village government, though the central authorities did review the professional and political standing of teachers.

in the interests of improving national agricultural production. The Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads and Communications (*Ministerstvoto na obshtestvenite sgradi, putishtata i suobshcheniata*, or MOSPS) operated the state's monopolies on telegraph and telephone lines and on the operation of railroads.²¹

All of these ministries, as detailed below, were active in Pirin. But the latter's "shadow government" took over elements of their powers. The state could, and did, expand rail lines, dictate national school curricula or demand a formal hiring process for government employees. But VMRO influenced the hiring of local government employees, distributed "local funds" to communities in the region for schools and public works and directly pressured the local representatives of the central ministries. VMRO's strength came in the midst of political and economic crises that beset the Bulgarian government in the 1920s, and formed the conditions in which VMRO was able to establish its own administration in Pirin.

The fall of Stamboliiski in 1923, as discussed in Chapter Four, crystallized the dilemmas Bulgarian political leaders would face in the interwar period. These included the lack of political consensus, an isolated political elite and an electorate chiefly composed of a peasantry with little inclination to participate in politics (at least following the overthrow of the Agrarian regime that represented them). The *coup* that unseated Stamboliiski did briefly mobilize broad support from across the political spectrum. Those few groups not directly participating with the Democratic Harmony bloc (*Demokratichen Sgovor*, hereafter *Sgovor*)

²¹ In 1934, MOSPS was divided into two ministries, one for public works and a second for the rail, post, telephone and telegraph networks.

still refused to help the Agrarians resist the coup.²² Such unity did not last. The interwar period saw political leaders from Aleksandur Tsankov to Tsar Boris foster divisions between political parties to prevent the emergence of successful coalitions in opposition, rather than attempt to build a single ruling coalition. This division contributed to a feeling of political stagnation and alienation. Though Stamboliiski may have been autocratic, he had enjoyed mass support in democratic elections. Successive regimes never obtained the same levels of popularity.²³ VMRO is thus unusual as an organization with significant mass support in Bulgaria, albeit limited to émigrés and the inhabitants of Pirin.

Aleksandur Tsankov, prime minister from 1923 to 1926, continued some of Stamboliiski's reforms as well as wartime policies of government rationalization and economic intervention.²⁴ Within four months the new regime was confronted by the September Uprising led by the Bulgarian Communist Party (*Bulgarska Komunisticeska Partiia*, or BKP), a rebellion stronger in the provinces than in urban and industrializing Sofia. The army and VMRO were called upon to

²² The National Liberals, Social Democrats and Communists all refused to cooperate. The National Liberals would, however, participate in Tsankov's cabinet, as would an independent from the Social Democrats. Kostadinova, 56.

²³ The electoral turnouts in Bulgaria, always higher than 80 percent in the interwar period, would on the surface belie such a claim. However, voting was obligatory by law. Moreover, "electoral machines" were crucial in bringing voters to the polls. The two most successful machines, in fact, were in Petrich (run by VMRO), Pashmakli and Mastanli — the latter two dominated by local Pomak authorities who, since 1913, traded support for dominant political parties in exchange for tolerance of local Islamic belief. See Kostadinova, 41-70.

²⁴ In this light, see Aleksandur Tsankov, *Bulgariia v burno vreme: spomeni* (Sofia: Prozorets, 1998), 122-123, 183, 203.

eliminate the uprising, which lasted only a few weeks in isolated areas.²⁵ The turmoil gave Tsankov the pretext to declare martial law, crack down on political opposition within Bulgaria and ban the Communist Party on April 1, 1924. Bulgarian politics became polarized between the left and the right, with simultaneous (if limited) “red” and “white” terrors against a backdrop of a dissatisfied and disinterested “green” peasantry. The Agrarian Party itself split into factions following Stamboliiski’s death, and was unable to provide a viable alternative.

Political violence escalated with the Communist assassination of parliament member General Kosta Georgiev on April 14, 1925 and the attempt during Georgiev’s funeral to kill Tsar Boris by means of dynamite planted in the dome of Sveti Nedelia Cathedral in Sofia. Although Boris left early and was unharmed, the explosion killed 128 in the mourning party, including three members of parliament, fourteen generals and both the mayor and chief of police of Sofia. A further 323 present were wounded.²⁶ Acting on public indignation over the scope of the bombing and the fact that the assassins had chosen a

²⁵ The Uprising was due, in part, to the urging of Moscow. The BKP’s refused to rally to Stamboliiski’s aid only to see the Agrarian regime replaced with a conservative one. The Communist Uprising was, ironically, stronger in rural areas where elements of the peasantry supported it than it was in Sofia, where the Bulgarian working class was concentrated. To add to the poor planning of the uprising, an agreement brokered with Todor Aleksandrov had guaranteed that VMRO would not intervene, but also that the Communists would not undertake any revolutionary activities in Pirin. When the Uprising spread into the province, Aleksandrov intervened on the side of Tsankov’s government.

²⁶ Georgi Markov, *Pokushenija, nasilie i politika v Bulgarii, 1878-1947* (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 2003), 221-228; Joseph Rothschild, *The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883-1936* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 259-260.

religious site for the attack, the government's response was a new wave of political crackdowns.

Tsankov was already seeking to expand state power and to intervene broadly in political, economic and social affairs within Bulgaria, with the goal of reshaping both the country and the Bulgarian nation itself.²⁷ This goal consciously continued the state's wartime policies between 1915-1918 and reflected a belief in the need to renew the state's authority. To do so, Tsankov resolved to eliminate any opposition. He thus sought to eradicate the Communist Party, which was now declared illegal, driven underground (as were its youth and trade union wings), crippled by thousands of arrests and the killing of perhaps 5,000 of its membership from 1923 to 1925. This same state apparatus of repression was also increasingly used to target the non-Communist opposition as well, for example the use of police to disrupt political rallies and crackdowns on political publications.²⁸ VMRO was spared such measures. Tsankov needed to maintain good relations with the paramilitary force that had proven invaluable in the *coup* of June and Communist counter-*coup* of September 1923.²⁹ But Tsankov's use of "white terror" provoked international criticism that barred Bulgaria's access to desperately needed loans from the League of Nations for refugee resettlement. On January 4, 1926, Tsankov and his cabinet resigned.³⁰

²⁷ Daskalov, 205.

²⁸ Kostadinova, 62.

²⁹ This opposition included VMRO as well, but Tsankov hoped that the group could either be reconciled to his plans or dealt with later. See Tsankov, 169, 199-200.

³⁰ The government was informed by Great Britain that until Tsankov was removed, the loan would not be granted.

Svogor formed a new cabinet around Andrei Liapchev, soon confirmed in office by the parliamentary elections of 1927. Liapchev now eased police repression, while keeping the portfolio of minister of internal affairs for himself and continuing Tsankov's use of the police against political rivals, if at a reduced level. The formation of an opposing "Iron Block" (*Zhelezen blok*) of Socialist, Communist and Agrarian interests confirmed the political division within the country and continued a sense of crisis. VMRO's continuing cross-border terrorist attacks in particular hindered the government's attempts to improve relations with either Great Britain and France or the Yugoslav Kingdom and Greece.³¹

It was in these circumstances that the Great Depression descended on Bulgaria in 1929. The country's economy had remained primarily agrarian, exporting cereals and industrial crops with limited industrial manufacturing for domestic purposes. The sharp drop in world agricultural prices devastated this economy.³² Liapchev responded by continuing and expanding state intervention in the economy.³³ The government had already revised tariffs upwards several times in the 1920s. By 1931 it would raise them further on foodstuffs (duties of 114 percent), semi-manufactured goods (72.5 percent) and manufactured goods

³¹ On this, see Dimitur Kosev, *Vunshnata politika na Bulgaria pri upravlenieto na Andrei Liapchev, 1926-1931* (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Professor Marin Drinov," 1995.)

³² In the 1926 census, the total number of active workers in mining, industry, communication, transport, trade and financial institutions was a mere 13 percent of all active workers nationwide. From the Glavna direktsiya na statistika, *Statisticheski godishnik na Bulgarskoto Tsarstvo* (Sofia: Glavna direktsiya na statistika, 1937), 35.

³³ Tsankov, Stamboliiski and Liapchev all had university degrees in economics — rare for Bulgaria, where fewer than 20 percent of the ministers of the MTZ possessed such credentials between 1878 - 1944. See Tasho V. Tashev, *Ministrite na Bulgaria, 1879-1999* (Sofia: Ak. Izd-vo Prof. Marin Drinov, 1999).

(110 percent).³⁴ Industrial concerns had already received tax-free privileges in 1925, as well as state subsidies on energy and railroad rates, the free use of state land and sales to the government at preferential rates. These benefits would be expanded during the Depression to protect other domestic producers. This sort of intervention helped Bulgaria achieve significant industrial growth even during the Depression, particularly in Sofia.³⁵ Domestic industrial producers of consumer goods were largely able to displace imported goods entirely.³⁶

These limited economic successes could not overcome the stagnation of the agricultural sector. Accounting for the majority of Bulgarian exports by volume and by value, its value plummeted after 1929. Markets in foreign countries were closed as governments raised tariff barriers and enacted preferential legislation for domestic producers.³⁷ State intervention had from 1923-1929 focused chiefly on industry, viewed across the political spectrum as the necessary factor for modernization of the economy. The state's response to agricultural crisis in 1929 was to step in. The limited agricultural reforms inherited from Stamboliiski's regime were expanded and Liapchev created *Hraniznos* in 1930, a state-run

³⁴ Gy. Ránki and J. Tomaszew, "The Role of the State in Industry, Banking and Trade," 17, in M.C. Kaser and E.A. Radice, eds., *The Economic History of Eastern Europe, 1919-1975* (vol 2). (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 17.

³⁵ John Lampe, *The Bulgarian Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Kent: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1986), 9, 68. Also note Alice Teichova, "Industry," in M.C. Kaser and E.A. Radice, eds., *The Economic History of Eastern Europe, 1919-1975* (vol 1). (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 225. Bulgarian industrial production quintupled between 1911 and 1941. On Sofia, see John R. Lampe and Marvin Jackson. *Balkan Economic History, 1550-1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 417.

³⁶ Teichova, ibid, notes that whereas in 1921 64 percent of consumer goods were imported, this had fallen to 17 percent by 1938.

³⁷ In the case of Great Britain and France, this included the various imperial territories outside Europe.

cereal monopoly, in an attempt to stabilize the market and arrange export sales.³⁸

This helped to modernize agriculture, which saw improvements both in production and (in 1934) greater access to credit. Such efforts did not alleviate the worst effects of the Depression in the villages, either in Pirin or throughout Bulgaria.³⁹ Industrial growth came at the expense of the villages as rising costs of domestic semi-manufactured and manufactured goods (already more expensive than the imports they displaced) were passed on to Bulgarian consumers. “Price scissors,” as agricultural products decreased in value but the cost of goods stayed stable or increased, reduced the real income of the peasantry by 50 percent within a decade.⁴⁰ Pirin, dependent on an export-oriented tobacco crop, was among those areas worst hit by the economic depression. In such conditions it is not surprising that the government suffered from a crisis of public confidence. Bulgarian Communists, now known as the Bulgarian Worker’s Party (BRP) after 1928, enjoyed a rapid expansion and weakened Liapchev’s position further by fomenting a series of strikes in 1930-31. Within Pirin, Communist agitation among tobacco workers achieved notable success. The Communists also made steady electoral gains (through front parties) in the provincial elections of November 1930 and municipal elections of February 1931.⁴¹ With the public

³⁸ Lampe and Jackson, 435.

³⁹ Statelova, *Istoriia na Nova Bulgaria*, 463.

⁴⁰ Lampe and Jackson, 450. See also Berend, 255-6.

⁴¹ On this, see Joseph Rothschild, *The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883-1936* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 275.

increasingly viewing the regime as unstable, Liapchev's cabinet resigned on April 21.⁴²

The state of crisis encouraged the formation of the “People’s Bloc” (*Naroden Blok*), a broad coalition including the Democratic Party, Radical Democrats, both wings of the Agrarians and part of the National Liberals. The Bloc campaigned on a “manifesto for the Bulgarian people” stressing both internal and external reconciliation and stability.⁴³ While successful in obtaining broad popular support and brokering a ruling coalition between the centrist parties in Bulgaria, the Bloc faced three significant challenges. The first was the BKP, which eclipsed the fading Social Democrats and dominated the political landscape on the left. The Bloc continued Tsankov and Liapchev’s tactics, declaring Communist front organizations illegal and using the police to disrupt the Communists.⁴⁴ If broadly successful, such actions continued to maintain a sense of division between the moderate parties and the left.

The Weak Central State: VMRO and Political Violence, 1924-1934

Successive Bulgarian governments also were undermined by the continuation of political violence after 1923. This trend was dominated by the rise of violence within VMRO, as factions turned to assassination and reprisals in an internal struggle for power. The Organization directed its interwar violence abroad, against Serbian and Greek troops, police and government officials or in

⁴² Daskalov, 206.

⁴³ Statelova, 478-482.

⁴⁴ Rothschild, 278-279.

fraternal struggles within VMRO itself. Bombings and attacks by machine gun also caused civilian casualties. The frequency of killings, even on the streets of Sofia, fostered a sense that the government tacitly permitted such violence. Such speculation was encouraged by Prime Minister Liapchev's own Macedonian origin: he was born in Resen, in Vardar Macedonia. Alternatively, the government might not be complicit in ongoing violence but simply weak, lacking sufficient power to intervene.⁴⁵

The sharp “civil war” within VMRO in 1924-25 and the killings that followed were sparked by the assassination of Todor Aleksandrov on August 30, 1924, but ultimately derived from the issue of autonomy within Bulgaria. The motivation for Aleksandrov’s murder has never been firmly established. The two most likely, and inter-compatible, motivations were continuing rivalry between VMRO’s top leaders and Aleksandrov’s hesitant agreement in May 1924 to cooperate with Communist groups in exchange for aid from the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ In the fall and winter of 1923 Aleksandrov negotiated with the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Comintern for aid and assistance.⁴⁷ From Aleksandrov’s point of view, this was not a commitment to Communist ideals. Rather, Soviet support would

⁴⁵ In 1930, Liapchev ordered a crackdown on VMRO violence and the arrests of key Macedonian figures, but was unable to carry out the policy successfully. Shoemaker, dispatch #73 July 19, 1930, RIAB 10/44.

⁴⁶ Untitled, unsigned enclosure dated 18 September, 1924 in J.C. White, Riga to Department of State, Washington D.C., 8 October, 1924, dispatch [strictly confidential] #2413, 1 (enc.). The information was reportedly from “the Soviet Political Representative in Vienna.” *Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of Yugoslavia, 1910-1929*. Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington D.C., cited here from the National Archives Microfilm Publications 1982 microfilm edition, microform #38, 29 reels.

⁴⁷ Bulgarskiata akademia na nauka, *Makedonija*, 676 – 679, 684 – 685.

ensure VMRO independence from the Bulgarian government and allow the movement to operate even in the face of Sofia's disapproval.

The Comintern, for its part, saw the Macedonian Question as one of several minority problems in Eastern Europe that could potentially serve as "wedge issues" in local politics, and had already begun to pressure both the Greek and Yugoslav parties to acknowledge the right to an independent Macedonian state.⁴⁸ An agreement was made between the Central Committee (Aleksandrov, Protopetrov and Peter Chaulev) in April 1924 and announced publicly on May 6. Criticism by both the Bulgarian government and from within VMRO led Aleksandrov to repudiate the agreement (and may have been a factor in his assassination in August of that year.)⁴⁹

Aleksandrov himself viewed the matter as a means by which to obtain a reliable source of arms and financial support, but the agreement angered anti-Communists within the movement and damaged relations with the government in Sofia. Elements of the Organization's "left wing" (including Dimitur Vlahov) would now formally secede in 1925 and form VMRO- *Obedineta* ("United"), a pro-Communist splinter organization that was intended to serve as the leader of a

⁴⁸ While the Communist Party of Yugoslavia agreed to Macedonian autonomy, this was *pro forma* support until 1928, when Sima Marković was replaced as secretary general of the party. Also note that Comintern support for Macedonian autonomy was uneven, and at times a "pro-Bulgarian" line was supported in order to provide domestic support for the BKP, the largest communist party in Southeastern Europe. See Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents*. (New York: Frank Cass, 1971), 185.

⁴⁹ See Markov, 177-187.

popular front within Macedonia.⁵⁰ Marxist Bulgarian and Macedonian historiography argues that he was murdered on behalf of the central government, while post-1989 national histories suggest that Communists were responsible.⁵¹

Whoever was responsible for his assassination, Aleksandrov's death launched a spiral of reprisal and counter reprisal that greatly weakened the unity of the movement. Aleksandrov's personal secretary Ivan Mihailov, previously his army *aide-de-camp* during the First World War, now claimed the vacant seat on the Central Committee and took control of the Organization, displacing the remaining two members, Petur Chaulev and General Aleksandur Protopetrov. Mihailov's assumption of power included giving orders to eliminate internal opposition. On September 12, 1924, VMRO members assassinated the organization's regional deputy, Aleko Vassilev and his assistant, Lt. Col. Atanasov.⁵² Both had close ties to Protopetrov, a member of the Central Committee since the Organization's re-founding in 1918 and who had accordingly expected to be Aleksandrov's heir. Much of the existing local leadership was eliminated as well, including the district leaders in Nevrokop and Petrich. This rivalry over the leadership of the movement triggered the outbreak of violence between "Mihailovist" and "Protopetrovist" factions. Although in 1925-

⁵⁰ Aleksandar Hristov, *VMRO i makedonskata drzhavnost (istorichesko-pravnen osvrt)* (Skopje: Kultura, 1993), 197-201. For the importance which both Marxist Bulgarian and Macedonian historiography placed on VMRO- *Obedineta*, it remained a marginal institution with more influence among like-minded émigrés in Vienna and Berlin than in Pirin.

⁵¹ For a still-Marxist influenced account, see Katarjiev, 327-339; for a contemporary post-Communist Bulgarian account, see Tiulekov, 57-77.

⁵² He also ordered the assassination of prominent "Socialist" VMRO members; Dimo Hadzhidimov was killed on September 13, 1924.

26 most of Protopetrov's sympathizers were driven out of Pirin, fighting continued albeit at a lower intensity even after the murder of Protopetrov in 1928.⁵³ Each assassination fed the cycle of reprisals and efforts to eliminate members of rival factions. Aleskandrov's death was followed by 193 assassinations in 1924, and Protopetrov's murder in 1928 triggered 225 more.⁵⁴ In 1932 alone, there were 33 assassinations or attempted assassinations by the two factions, most taking place in Sofia since the Organization under Mihailov had secured Pirin. Such assassinations commonly took the form of shootings in cafes and on city streets, including the use of sub-machine guns from moving vehicles.

As noted above, Liapchev's regime did little to stem the resort to violence. Although his successors in the National Bloc made sporadic attempts to do so they were largely unsuccessful as well, in part because Prime Minister Aleksandur Malinov believed the government lacked sufficient popular support to address the economic crisis, suppress the Communists *and* disarm VMRO's paramilitary forces.⁵⁵ VMRO's predominance continued to limit Bulgarian foreign policy. The People's Bloc maintained a revisionist foreign policy agenda acceptable to Macedonian émigrés and VMRO assassins. Frustrated by Sofia's apparent complicity with the paramilitary group, Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia signed the Balkan Entente on February 9, 1934, an alliance deliberately envisioned to constrain a potentially expansionist Bulgaria. Finally, the Bloc attempted to improve the Bulgarian economy through active state

⁵³ Markov, 204-205; 246-255.

⁵⁴ Daskalov, 248.

⁵⁵ Note Shoemaker, Sofia, May 20, 1933, #663, RIAB 1910-1944.

intervention. In this too, however, it was unsuccessful, lacking sufficient domestic or foreign sources of capital to revitalize the economy.⁵⁶

The period 1923-1934 was, then, a period in which continual political crisis and, after 1929, economic crisis encouraged a series of attempts by national political parties to solve crises by expanding state power. And, throughout this period, the problem of Pirin was a public and notable example of crisis. Not only was Pirin effectively ruled by VMRO, but its own crisis of leadership within Pirin prompted a rise in political violence that became a national issue. The central state lacked the power to displace VMRO despite its internal divisions. At best, Sofia pursued cohabitation in the province by maintaining the presence of the central ministries.

State Ministries in Pirin

The position of the central state in Pirin may be tracked by its role in provincial infrastructure and education. In both cases, the ministries maintained large and extensive structures that expanded from the First World War forward. In both areas state actions supported a Bulgarian national consciousness in the region. Improvements in infrastructure helped to tie Pirin to a Bulgarian national network of communications, travel and trade; educational curricula were deliberately designed to create a “Bulgarian spirit.” The ministries’ various policies did indeed carry the potential to integrate Pirin’s population with the rest of Bulgaria. They failed in this because VMRO’s dominance within the province

⁵⁶ Nissan Oren, *Revolution Administered: Agrarianism and Communism in Bulgaria* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 17.

extended to the creation of its own “alternate” administration and institutions. But the ministries’ policies over 1912-1934 served as a precursor for later and more intensive integrative efforts.

By 1912 the local transportation network had barely developed beyond an unpaved road running north-south from Dupnitsa through Gorna Dzhumaja and Sveti Vrach to Thrace and the Aegean coast. This was sufficient to export Pirin’s tobacco, grain and other agricultural goods to Salonika and to allow the Ottoman army to move military forces. Other areas, particularly the eastern *kazas* of Razlog and Nevrokop relied on unimproved trails maintained by local communities. Unification with Bulgaria spurred belated improvements as the region was re-oriented northwards and integrated into the Bulgarian state and economy. Many initial improvements, particularly in terms of communications, were aimed at meeting the needs of the military, particularly as Bulgaria’s entry into the First World War approached in 1914-1915. Rail lines during the war years were laid west from Kiustendil to Skopje and Bitola, facilitating the movement of military supplies and presumed Pirin’s postwar unification with Vardar Macedonia. Direct telegraph lines were built by 1915 to connect the province to Dupnitsa and link thirteen telegraph stations (including Petrich, Gordna Dzhumaia, Nevrokop and Melnik) in a network reaching towards the front lines in Vardar and the Seres front.⁵⁷

Over 1923-1934, the Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads and Communications undertook a further expansion and modernization of Pirin’s

⁵⁷ TsDA, Fond 178, opis 4, a.e. 32, a.e. 37 for the telegraph network, a.e. 63, a.e. 64 for the telephone network.

infrastructure. This included the extension of the state's railway network into Pirin, with two main connections. A north-south line followed the River Struma, running south from Dupnitsa to Gorna Dzhumaia then through Krupnik and Sv. Vrach to link to a Greek line to Thessalonika at the border. Local lines built during the First World War to facilitate resupply of the Salonika Front were replaced with a permanent civilian line, then further expanded and improved in the mid-1930s.⁵⁸ A second route built in the late 1920s through the eastern parts of the province from Pazardzhik (near Razlog) to Nevrokop, with a branch line built in 1940-41 to service Bansko.⁵⁹ This Pirin trackage represents roughly 20 percent of the 760 kilometers of new rail lines built in Bulgaria between 1921 and 1939.⁶⁰ In addition, the ministry improved the major north-south road in the province, although much of the road network remained under the aegis of local communities.

In terms of communications, the ministry expanded the PTT, the state-run post, telegraph and telephone network in the province. Telegraph lines were established to link all of the region's towns to the Bulgarian network, and by the 1930s all of the larger villages as well. Telegraph and telephone stations were built throughout the district, and the existing stations were improved and expanded.⁶¹ Telephone service followed even more quickly, and by the mid 1930s telephone lines were laid to all of the towns and most larger villages,

⁵⁸ TsDA, Fond 157, opis 1, a.e. 894, a.e. 938, *passim*.

⁵⁹ TsDA, Fond 157, opis 1, a.e. 794 (Nevrokop); a.e. 988 (Bansko).

⁶⁰ ⁶¹ See Rumen Daskalov, *Bulgarskoto obshtestvo, 1878-1939: Tom II, Naselenie, obshtestvo, kultura* (Sofia: IK Gutenberg, 2005), 194.

⁶¹ TsDA, Fond 178, opis 4, a.e. 65, l. 1; a.e. 68, l. 1. Fond 178, opis 4, a.e. 65, l. 1 lists the different point-to-point lines laid in Pirin.

usually in the form of public pay phones housed at the central post offices.⁶² In 1915 Pirin (excluding territory subsequently lost to the Yugoslav Kingdom) possessed a single large 24-hour PTT office (in Gorna Dzhumaia), two standard offices (in Petrich and Nevrokop), and nine “limited hours” offices. By 1929, this network had been expanded to include six 24-hour “regional” and “district” offices in Petrich, Gorna Dzhumaia, Razlog, Sv. Vrach and Nevrokop (all offering twenty-four hour telephone and telegraph service), twelve full-service post-telephone-telegraph stations, and 88 village “telephone and postal service posts.” Roughly 75 of these PTT offices were new construction, representing a significant expansion of the network in Pirin over a fifteen-year period.⁶³ Such improvements helped integrate the region with the rest of Bulgaria by facilitating travel and communications.

Despite this very real expansion of state-run rail and PTT in the provinces, these new links did not completely blanket the region. Few railroad spurs were built from the main lines and the impact of the railroad was thus mixed. Villagers on the Struma Valley floor, including the tobacco-growing area in the southwest, generally possessed good road access to towns or villages with rail access. Villagers in the mountains on the west and east of Pirin, however, had to travel over the poor local roads to take agricultural production to a railhead. While the towns (and villages along the rail lines between them) were connected to the national network, much of the rural population would thus remain disconnected

⁶² Daskalov, 214.

⁶³ Compiled from TsDA, Fond 178, opis 4, a.e. 32; a.e. 33. See also Daskalov, 213.

until local roads could be improved to allow easy access to railheads. In addition, the topography of Pirin Macedonia — bisected by Mt. Pirin — meant that the Gorna Dzhumaia-Petrich railroad and telegraph/telephone line was not connected to the Razlog-Nevrokop line at the provincial level. Train travel or communications required a circuitous route outside provincial boundaries.⁶⁴ The state may have linked Pirin to the Bulgarian rail and communications network, but it did not connect the western and eastern halves of Pirin.

Education provided a second example of limited state success. The Ministry of Education formally directed local schools throughout the country. Curricula were set in Sofia, stipulating not only the subjects to be taught but paying crucial attention to how issues of national consciousness were to be presented. One letter from the Ministry of Education to local high school headmasters is particularly instructive. It stipulates that one of the functions of education is to instill a sense of *rodinoznanie*, national history.⁶⁵

... the school program of every good modern state pays special attention to the subject of national history. ... make the teenage Bulgarian well aware of his own motherland, to be full of love for it, to be faithful to it and useful to his family through this love.⁶⁶

The local school was organized, ideally, on the French model. It was to be extension of the central government in fostering a sense of national loyalty and

⁶⁴ The topographic challenge daunted later Communist engineers as well, and the lines have never been connected at the provincial level.

⁶⁵ “National history” only approximates *rodinoznanie*. *Rodina* is closer to *Heimat* in meaning “home” or “native place,” and *rodinoznanie* would translate literally as “knowledge of one’s birth-land” but carrying a connotation of patriotism and loyalty. I thank Mariya Mitova for her critique of my translation and the term’s full connotations.

⁶⁶ ODAB, Fond 234K, opis 2, a.e. 13.

identity. Prior to 1912, local clergy and gymnasium-educated school teachers ran Pirin's schools, overseen by town or village councils. Religion could overshadow issues of national consciousness, as raised by the village priest or the town's Orthodox hierarchy. In 1911, for example, the municipality of Bansko demanded that children from Protestant families be banned from attending the local school run by the Bulgarian Exarchate. The town raised further complaints in the early 1920s with regards to whether Jewish students should be allowed to attend public schools.⁶⁷ The interwar Ministry of Education was able, at least, to overcome the Exarchate's influence over education in Pirin by centralizing school curricula and focused on education as a vehicle of Bulgarian national consciousness rather than Orthodox confessional consciousness.

Centralization of curricula, however, did not mean corresponding control over other aspects of local education, much of which VMRO proved able to usurp. The ministry did conduct inspections of local schools and reviewed the qualifications of teachers.⁶⁸ The central government also provided for some funding for the building of primary schools and gymnasiums in the region.⁶⁹ But the state's power was circumscribed by the fact that teachers were hired and paid at the local level. This contrasts with the policies of other states in the region, as Irina Livezeanu has shown in the case of interwar Romania. Its Ministry of Education took pains to insure that teachers from regions of disputed

⁶⁷ ODAB, Fond 234K, opis 2, a.e. 10. In both cases, the stated concern was that the inclusion of non-Orthodox would diminish Orthodox theological education provided at school.

⁶⁸ TsDA, Fond 177K, opis 3, a.e. 33; a.e. 125; a.e. 152; a.e. 190; Fond 177K, opis 1, a.e. 439, 607.

⁶⁹ TsDA, Fond 173K, opis 4. a.e. 32, a.e. 52.

national consciousness — e.g., Bessarabia, Dobrudzha — were transferred to other regions, and that teachers from the Regat (pre-1913 Romania) were assigned to these schools.⁷⁰ Although teachers from “Old Bulgaria” came to teach in Pirin, the state did not (or could not) intervene to stop the hiring of either teachers native to the region or from the refugee population.

State contributions to education were relatively minor, with most money raised by the local village or municipality. This inability of the central government to financially support local state organs effectively was a source of local complaint. In a 1930 letter from the board of the Nevrokop Gymnasium to the Ministry of the Education, the board complained about this limited funding. “Our town, which primarily consists of refugees, is not able to maintain the pedagogical school with municipal means.”⁷¹ For a state burdened with a large refugee population and reparations, shifting part of this cost to local government was a practical solution. But it meant the state was not well-equipped to contest foundations, local groups or others who contributed money — particularly Macedonian organizations linked to VMRO, as well as the organization itself — and expected their own interests to be reflected in education.

The nation-building role of the state in Pirin’s railways, communications and education was thus constrained. State intervention in other areas of the province achieved even less, compounded by the economic crisis already noted. Administrative payroll costs alone came to a range of 35-44 percent of the annual

⁷⁰ See Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 72-77, 107-109, 119-120, 173-174.

⁷¹ ODAB, Fond 164K, a.e. 3, Protocol #26, 1930.

state budget by the end of the 1920s.⁷² The state's limited postwar income moreover now needed to cover reparation payments, provide aid to a considerable number of war widows, invalids and military pensioners and rebuild a strained economy.

The central state thus could contribute relatively little financially to local administrative organs, and Pirin was no exception.⁷³ State economic policy over the 1920s, for example, brought little improvement to Pirin. Despite the opening of a coal mine near the village of Brezhani and lumber mill in the village of Yakoruda, industry remained limited in the early 1920s. The chief industrial employer was the tobacco drying and “pre-production” centers built in 1914 in Gorna Dzhaumaia and Petrich, employing roughly 1,100 workers. Over-reliance on tobacco as the province’s industrial crop proved disastrous. A drop in international prices in 1921, followed by a severe drought in 1927 and then the Depression crippled the local tobacco industry.⁷⁴ The province’s dependence on agriculture can be seen in the records of the Blagoevgrad Macedonian-Adrianople Volunteer’s Society (introduced in Chapter Four), almost half of whom worked directly in agriculture.⁷⁵

⁷² Daskalov, 390.

⁷³ VMRO’s own policies exacerbated the situation. As VMRO took advantage of local revenues for its own clientalist network and excluded national political parties, logically, central authorities and political figures might dedicate limited financial resources to other parts of Bulgaria.

⁷⁴ Ivan Katarjiev, *Istorija na makedonskiot narod: Makedonija meѓу Balkanskите i Vtorata svetska vojna (1912-1941)* (Skopje: Institut za natsionalna istorija, 2000), 227.

⁷⁵ In the application files, 46 percent of the members list agriculture as occupation. Of the remainder, 18 percent listed “blue collar” occupations (as “worker” or “general worker”), ten percent were artisans or craftsmen

A similar story of relative failure in Pirin was the state's effort to improve local health and hygiene. Rates of malarial infection in Pirin, particularly in Petrich, were at twice the levels of Bulgaria as a whole. The Ministry of Heath did seek to eliminate malaria from the province and by the late 1920s had come to distribute large amounts of quinine locally. But 106 people still died of malaria in 1928, and over half the 18,000 people tested that year were found to be infected.⁷⁶ Tuberculosis remained a significant problem as well. Although state programs reduced the impact of the disease slightly, in the mid-1920s it remained responsible for between 10 percent (in Razlog) to 18 percent (Nevrokop) of total deaths.⁷⁷ In terms of local hygiene and other infrastructure the state lacked the resources to fund sanitation projects or drain marshy areas that would resolve the problems.

Formally, the province of Pirin continued to be governed by Bulgarian law. The ministries in Sofia continued to send orders to their local organs in Pirin. But it was members of VMRO who acted to carry out the central state's orders, interpreting such orders as they saw fit. The result was the creation of an autonomous "virtual" regime in the province.

(professions ranging from butcher, mason, miller, merchant and cobbler to photographer and mechanic), seven percent listed service trades (the list includes carriage driver, coffee maker, gardener, innkeeper, pubkeeper and taxi driver) and twelve percent "white collar" professions (teller, clerk, "city official," "office worker" and in one case, landlord). Two members stated they were unemployed, one that he was pensioned and one that he was an invalid. Although the role of agriculture seems diminished, this is a high proportion for a town where fields would be located a considerable distance from urban residences.

⁷⁶ Vasil Sharkov, *Grad Gorna Dzhumaia – minalo i dnes* (Sofia: Pechatnitsa na Armeiskiia voenno-izdatelski fond, 1930), 168-176.

⁷⁷ Katarjiev, *Istorija na makedonskiot narod*, 251.

VMRO's Shadow Government

Even foreign diplomatic representatives in Sofia reported to their home governments regarding the VMRO's creation of a "state within a state." Effectively, the organization was able to visibly wrest control of a province from the central government — an ominous precedent and one that undermined successive regimes.⁷⁸ Following the *coup d'état* of 1923, the Central Committee of VMRO first under Todor Aleksandrov and then under Ivan Mihailov established control over the region's political and economic life, collaborating with allied Macedonian organizations to provide social services. As VMRO now defined it, the organization's responsibility for the "defense" of Macedonian interests now extended to the defense of their economic and cultural interests as well.⁷⁹ VMRO expanded to create its own somewhat informal regime in the province. In addition, existing contacts between VMRO and émigré groups by the mid-1920s led to the former assuming leadership — definitively at the local level and predominantly at the national level — over the broad "Macedonian movement." These groups are listed on Table 5 (next page):

⁷⁸ See, for example, Henry W. Shoemaker, Sofia, to Department of State, Washington D.C., 5 January, 1933, dispatch [strictly confidential] #582, 6, Department of State, Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of Bulgaria, 1910-1944, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington D.C., cited here from the National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1982 edition, microform #1207, 21 reels.

⁷⁹ Katarjiev, *Istorija na makedonskiot narod*, 369-370, gives a fresh revisionist Macedonian examination of VMRO's policies in Pirin. This marks a departure from historiography that stressed the organization as illegitimate and favored the smaller but Communist VMRO-Ob.

Table 5
VMRO's Affiliations to Macedonian Organizations⁸⁰
Rival Factions of the Organization (after 1924)

VMRO-Ob (Communists)* (In Vienna after 1925)	VMRO (Mihailov)	VMRO (Protogerov) (In Sofia after 1925)
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Organizations throughout Pirin

Paramilitary	Political	Social	Economic/ Occupational	Academic	Media
VMRO <i>cheti</i>	Macedonian Parliamentary Group	Local Macedonian Women's Organization chapters	Sub-district Agricultural Communes*	Local Macedonian Students' Union chapters	<i>Svoboda ili Smurt</i>
VMRO militia		Local Macedonian-Odrin Veteran's Society chapters	Exarchate Brotherhood of Clergy* (Blagoevgrad)	Local reading room societies	<i>Revoliutsionen List</i>
		Invalid Veterans' Society	Macedonian National Bank*		
		Local Emigrants' Society Chapters			
		Local Church Building Societies*			
		Muslim <i>Vakuf</i> Building Society* (Nevrokop)			

Organizations marked by asterix had little formal involvement with VMRO
Affiliated National Organizations

		Macedonian Woman's Organization		Macedonian Scientific Institute	<i>Makedonski Pregled</i> (journal)
		Macedonian-Odrin Veteran's Society		Vardar Macedonian Students' Society	<i>Ilinden</i> (annual)
		Ilinden Emigrant's Society		Macedonian Youth Cultural-Educational Union	

⁸⁰ To determine VMRO's relative involvement for those groups whose records were not examined directly, the *opisi*, annotated document lists, of the ODAB were consulted, since VMRO's involvement is invariably noted. For a rough introduction to the *opisi* available, see Kunka Dasheva, Nikola Tsvetanov and Strahil Tochev, *Putevoditel po arhivnite fondove, 1805-1944* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1978).

Assuming control required VMRO to consider not simply paramilitary issues but also political, economic and “social welfare” affairs. In 1923, Todor Aleksandrov stated that VMRO had created a “non-partisan regime” in the district.⁸¹ The organization represented the will of Macedonian Bulgarians, and other political parties were unnecessary. Anarchist and Communist activists were seen as particularly divisive, and after open fighting broke out with Communist insurgents in Razlog in 1923, VMRO’s relations with the Bulgarian Communist Party were poor.⁸²

While rejecting participation in the existing political parties, VMRO continued to hold elections in the district in two different forms. One was for representation within the organization itself. Delegates were selected in local, internal elections for representation within congresses and regional representation.⁸³ This supplemented (but did not entirely replace) the tradition of individual *cheti* selecting their own leaders or choosing a leader to follow. Regular regional and national congresses of the Organization offered a forum in which elected delegates could critique or shape policy, and provided the experience of a more formal administrative style.⁸⁴

National elections were still held in the region, and voter participation in the May 1927 and June 1931 *Subranie* elections was high. But VMRO controlled

⁸¹ TsDA, Fond 1932K, opis 1, a.e. 103., 1-10; DAB, Fond 1320, opis 2, a.e. 55, 34.

⁸² Katardzhiev, *Vreme na zreenje*, 180-181.

⁸³ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 73-74.

⁸⁴ For example, the protocol and resolution in TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 23, l. 1-3.

these elections, selecting which candidates would be allowed to stand.⁸⁵ Agreements with the national political parties entered these candidates on electoral lists, but they were effectively VMRO's own delegates to the parliament.⁸⁶ National elections were thus subverted by local agendas; in 1927, VMRO proceeded to establish its own parliamentary front, the Macedonian Parliamentary Group (*Makedonskata parlamentarna grupa*). VMRO picked who would stand from the Group in elections, and every valid ballot cast in Pirin that year was recorded as cast for members of the group.⁸⁷ The mandate of the group was, expressly, to voice VMRO's (and Macedonia's) concerns within the parliament.⁸⁸

Relations with local administrative leaders were even closer. Generally, mayors of villages and towns and administrators of local districts were expected to be on friendly terms with VMRO, and many were drawn from the movement itself. The line between local government and VMRO was, in fact, often blurred.

⁸⁵ TsDA, Fond 173, opis 5, a.e. 502, l. 232-234.

⁸⁶ While striking, VMRO's control over local elections was not an isolated event in Bulgaria but may also be viewed as a rather extreme form of political corruption. Note Daskalov, 177-178. Local autonomy in exchange for patronage occurred elsewhere, notably in the Rhodopi mountains where after 1913 local elites traded their political support (and the inhabitants' votes) to the dominant political party in power in exchange for a relaxation of the Bulgarianization campaign. The contemporary Movement for Rights and Freedoms is generally considered to play a similar role in mobilizing Bulgaria's Turkish minority; the party has been a member of every coalition government in the post-Communist period.

⁸⁷ Dimitur Tiulekov, "Makedonskata parlamentarna grupa, 1927-1934" in *Natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie na makedonskite i trakiiskite bulgari, 1878-1944: Tom IV, Osvoboditelnite borbi sled purvata svetovna voina, 1919-1944* (Sofia: Makedonski nauchen institute, 2003), 264. On the election, see Kostadinova, 64. Kostadinova notes that this meant that 3.3 percent of all ballots cast in Bulgaria were effectively controlled by VMRO.

⁸⁸ TsDA, fond 396, opis 2, a.e. 2, l. 8.

The Organization undertook administrative projects on its own initiative, for example surveying local living conditions and recommending communities in need of aid.⁸⁹ Generally, though, the organization itself did not take on all responsibilities of formal rule — and indeed, its members were often not well prepared to be local administrators. VMRO's internal regulations suggest a certain lack of professionalism. One memo from 1927 stresses that to preserve secrecy, members should cease discussing “Organizational affairs” in cafes and should attempt meetings in more formal circumstances.⁹⁰ VMRO accordingly left most of the day-to-day administration of Pirin to the established organs of the central government.

Prepared or not, VMRO did take complete charge of one function: the collection of taxes and the disbursement of revenues. Just as the Organization challenged the state's monopoly on armed force, so too it usurped the state's monopoly over taxation. VMRO claimed the right to levy taxes and “forced contributions” throughout Pirin.⁹¹ A formal tax system for specific goods was quickly developed. Pirin's tobacco industry was particularly important in terms of raising revenue,⁹² but taxes were levied as well on animal hides, wood, horses and mules, livestock (particularly livestock imported from Greece and Serbia) and a two percent “sales tax” was imposed on various manufactured goods.⁹³ This

⁸⁹ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2., a.e. 17, l. 140-141.

⁹⁰ TsDA, Fond 396, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 92.

⁹¹ TsDA Fond 1932, op 3, a.e. 146, l. 6-10

⁹² TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 257.

⁹³ TsDA, Fond 1909K, op 2, a.e. 35, l. 3-4.

reflects a relatively sophisticated system by which industry, commerce and imports were all taxed — a system comparable to that of the Bulgarian state.

Complicating matters was VMRO's normal avoidance of the term "taxation" (*danutsi*) in their financial records. The largest "voluntary donations" within the Pirin region to VMRO in 1926 all come, suspiciously, from tobacco businessmen.⁹⁴ The Organization's financial records note a variety of funding sources, including membership dues, gifts, "fines," "transit fees" and bequests.⁹⁵ In some cases, cafes, stores or local industries were operated by VMRO or with investment from the Organization. Donations and taxes were levied from throughout the region, with local district leaders reporting income received.⁹⁶ Although villages contributed, towns such as Nevrokop, Gorna Dzhumaia, Petrich, Melnik and Sv. Vrach provided the largest sums. In the Petrich district, for example, 44 percent of contributions and taxes collected came from the

⁹⁴ Panaiot Rainov, at 300,000 and Panaiot Tasev, at 200,000. TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2., a.e. 17, l. 162a-163a. Of the list of 52 greatest contributions of 10,000 or more leva, 20 occupations are listed. This includes three tobacco businessmen, six businessmen in unspecified trades, one engineer, two pubkeepers, two manufacturers, one dentist, one butcher, one landowner, one "garderner" and one lawyer. The three tobacco businessmen "donated" over eight times the average for other or unnamed professions, and represented over a third of the total value of "donations" over 10,000 for the year.

⁹⁵ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 1, l. 1-23.

⁹⁶ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 156-163a. Some individual donations were quite large, such as the 1925 donations of 150,000 leva by Dr. Konstantin Despotov (of Melnik), 50,000 leva by Konstantin Karaianev (of Sveti Vrach), and 40,000 leva by Georgi Dotskov (of Vrania). Whether these were voluntary or taxed donations is an issue revisited below.

municipality of Petrich, the rest from the villages, a sum disproportionate to the district's urban-rural population ratio.⁹⁷

The collection of taxes, donations and other income represented a considerable financial potential, and one that VMRO exploited. In 1925 alone, for example, the VMRO district leader of Nevrokop raised 5,200,446 leva; Sv. Vrach raised 7,895,533 leva; Gorna Dzhumaia, 4,000,000; Petrich 239,977; and Razlog, 831,640 leva, for a total of some 18,157,596 leva — not including donations or aid-in-kind from Macedonian organizations within Pirin⁹⁸ or elsewhere in the country.⁹⁹ Such levies were in addition to state taxes and tariffs on goods. While most of this money was to be used to continue the Organization's armed struggle, an appreciable amount was also returned to the community.

A significant aspect of VMRO's "administrative mobilization" of Pirin was its financial support for local communities within the district.¹⁰⁰ Funds were provided to refugee families, local governments, foundations and sometimes for specific projects. No doubt, clientelism played a significant role in such allocations (and one that the organization did not record in its financial accounts). But the organization did fund real improvements. VMRO funds helped establish

⁹⁷ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 167. TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 168 (Nevrokop), l. 169 (Voden), l. 174-176 (Razlog district)

⁹⁸ The Macedonian Charity Brotherhood in Nevrokop, for example, held a fund raising dinner and sold badges for the "Day of Macedonia," the money to be used "benefit the Macedonian cause." ODAB Fond 123K, opis 1, a.e. 1. L. 3. The student society at the Nevrokop Pedagogical School similarly raised money to be used for "propaganda abroad." ODAB Fond 123K, opis 1, a.e. 1, l. 23.

⁹⁹ On VMRO's funding outside of Pirin, see Tiulekov, 130.

¹⁰⁰ Dimitur Tiulekov, "Spomagatelnata organizatsiia," 170.

both a hospital in Sv. Vrach¹⁰¹ and the first electric plants in Bansko and Gorna Dzhumaia.¹⁰² Internal records of the organization stress the need for *voivoda* to pay attention to “village economic politics”¹⁰³ and that assistance should be given to local communities when needed. Following the 1925 Petrich incident, for example, local *voivodi* directed VMRO members to refuse government offers of financial compensation for their role in defending the town. Instead, the money was donated towards the construction of a new school for the town.

Schools were recipients of similar aid. Here, regional commanders carried their administrative policies further, undertaking their own inspections of schools and teachers in the region. In some cases, VMRO members sought chiefly to determine which communities were in need of additional instructors and funding.¹⁰⁴ The Organization often provided support for local reading rooms and libraries,¹⁰⁵ both in terms of financial aid and also donations of the books and pamphlets published by affiliated Macedonian groups such as the Macedonian Scientific Institute in Sofia. This included copies of the Organization’s newspapers, *Svoboda ili smurt* and *Revoluutsonen list*. Just as important, however, was the information it collected about the political reliability of teachers. Organization leaders filed reports detailing the names of teachers in local schools, their place of birth, where they currently taught and their participation in

¹⁰¹ ODAB, Fond 26K, opis 1., a.e. 14, l 28.

¹⁰² On Bansko, see ODAB, Fond 26K, opis 1, a.e. 13, l 40-41. On Gorna Dzhumaia, see Boris Keremidchiev, *Niakoga v Gorna Dzhumaia* (Blagoevgrad: Pirin-Print, 1994), 55-56.

¹⁰³ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 25.

¹⁰⁴ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2., a.e. 17, l. 108-109.

¹⁰⁵ Tuiulekov, “Spomagatelnata organizatsiia,” 175.

political activities.¹⁰⁶ While the Ministry of Education retained formal oversight of Pirin's schools, VMRO influenced practical decisions within the province.

The Popular Reception

VMRO was thus able to act successfully "as a state" for defense, taxation and in providing funding for local services — in each case, to a greater extent than the central government of Bulgaria itself. And popular opinion seemed to accept this predominance, until the violence between Mihailov's Central Committee and competing factions spun out of control in the early 1930s.¹⁰⁷

VMRO could expect a sympathetic hearing from the large refugee population within Bulgaria. Although Sofia and other large towns (Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas) proved the most popular destination for refugees, sizeable numbers did settle within Pirin. Over 1919-1921 alone, 484 refugee families totaling 1,954 people settled in the district center of Gorna Dzhumaia.¹⁰⁸ Twenty thousand refugees settled in the region by December 1923, including 4,788 in Nevrokop, 3,564 in Melnik and 2,968 in Gorna Dzhumaia. In all, refugees now made up a fifth of the region's population of 202,000.

¹⁰⁶ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 29-44. Not all district heads provided information in the same format, and different letters have slightly different formats. VMRO's function in this respect would be continued by the Ministry of Education after 1934, as discussed in Chapter Six.

¹⁰⁷ Determining public opinion is constrained by that same rise in violence, however. Vocal public criticism of VMRO in the 1920s could result in reprisals. In the 1930s, in turn, the state censored public commentary on VMRO's former rule of the province.

¹⁰⁸ ODAB, Fond 63K, a.e. 88, Protocol #9 of October 22, 1921.

These refugees were disproportionately urban dwellers, changing the demographic character of Pirin. Information from the national census notes that in Bulgaria as a whole, 76 percent of refugees from Vardar Macedonia now settled in Bulgarian cities and towns, as did 56 percent of refugees from Aegean Macedonia. This compares to refugees from the Northern Dobrudzha (65 percent), Southern Dobrudzha (49 percent), East Thrace (41 percent), West Thrace (40 percent) and the “West Lands” (35 percent). Such figures for urbanization are much higher than that of the native born population at only 19 percent.¹⁰⁹ Melnik was almost completely resettled by refugees. Its Greek population fled during the period 1913-1918 or was deported after the war as part of the Greco-Bulgarian Population Exchange negotiated through the League of Nations.¹¹⁰ Petrich, Gorna Dzhumaia, Sv. Vrach, Nevrokop all saw an influx of population that led to steady urban growth throughout the period (see Table 6).

Table 6
Urban Growth in Pirin, 1923-1934¹¹¹

<i>Urban area</i>	<i>Population</i>			
	<i>1890</i>	<i>1920</i>	<i>1926</i>	<i>1934</i>
Bansko	5,700	4,532	5,062	5,540
Gorna Dzhumaia	~800	7,009	9,384	9,974
Melnik	~1,200	721	722	521
Nevrokop	~930	6,156	7,165	8,767
Petrich	3,749	7,169	8,380	10,120
Razlog	3,102	452	492	532
Sv. Vrach	n/a	1,533	2,780	4,703
Iakovuda	~3,650	3,800	4,150	4,572

¹⁰⁹ Compiled from the 1920 census data in TsDA Fond 453K, opis 2, a.e. 5.

¹¹⁰ On the exchange, see Victor Roudmetof, *Collective Memory, National Identity and Ethnic Conflict: Greece, Bulgaria and the Macedonian Question* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 97.

¹¹¹ Figures derived from TsDA Fond 453K, opis 2, *passim* and the respective volumes of the *Statisticheski godishnik na Bulgarskoto Tsarstvo*. Earlier figures are from Kunchev, as detailed in Chapter Two.

Birth place in:	Number:
Aegean Macedonia	68,843
Eastern Thrace	60,582
Western Thrace	38,333
Vardar Macedonia	19,798
Southern Dobrudzha	18,767
“West Lands”	14,632
Northern Dobrudzha	3,838
Total “Foreign Born Population”	224,793
Ethnic Bulgarian Population	4,218,615
Total Population (including Turks, Greeks, Jews and Roma)	5,423,408

VMRO’s territorial revisionism was deliberately intended to appeal to these émigrés now settled within Bulgaria. Over five percent of Bulgaria’s “ethnically Bulgarian” population (as recorded by census) was foreign-born; the locations of origin are listed on Table 7.

Accordingly, VMRO’s agenda was to appeal not just to Pirin’s inhabitants but also to Macedonian émigrés outside of the region and to find common cause with the Dobrudzhan and Thracian refugee groups as well.¹¹³ The Organization’s newspapers reflected this broader appeal, and it promoted public meetings to protest Greek and Serbian rule over Macedonia.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Based on the data in TsDA, Fond 453, opis 2, a.e. 18, l. 1-21.

¹¹³ VMRO’s agenda of territorial revisionism *per se* generally found a receptive audience, but there was also some degree of rivalry and disunity over which revisionist agenda to push *first*. Thracian and Dobrudzhan refugee organizations sometimes sought priority for their own claims, particularly because such claims were simpler: e.g., the Dobrudzha was disputed only with Romania, whereas Macedonia was disputed with both Greece and the Yugoslav Kingdom. Refugees from the West Lands (in the Yugoslav Kingdom), in contrast, generally were in agreement with VMRO’s agenda.

¹¹⁴ ODAB, Fond 123K, opis 1, a.e. 3, 1925.

Bulgaria's Macedonian émigrés founded dozens of other charity foundations, fraternal organizations and cultural institutions. They gradually coalesced into a movement around VMRO. The Organization's own members often belonged to these other Macedonian groups, which in turn frequently received funding and support from VMRO. The Organization of Macedonian Students, for example, promoted ties with university students studying in Sofia, holding student congresses in Gorna Dzhumaia. The Macedonian Youth Organization had large chapters in Nevrokop, Gorna Dzhumaia, Bansko, Petrich, Razlog, Sv. Vrach, Simitli, Dobrinishte, Belitsa and Yakoruda, with a number of smaller groups in villages.¹¹⁵ Each of the towns had at least one large "cultural" organization, such as the "Gotse Delchev" Macedonian Charity Cultural-Educational Brotherhood in Razlog. Such groups served as liaisons with VMRO, directing requests for aid to regional leaders of the Organization and often working with such figures to determine how aid should be allocated.¹¹⁶ In Pirin, such groups provided links between both émigrés and the indigenous population and between villages and towns. Each organization held regional congresses, encouraged the exchange of information and travel between communities and stressed a common Macedonian heritage.

VMRO provided financial support for such organizations when needed and received contributions in return when possible. The organization also provided

¹¹⁵ Dimitur Gotsev, *Mladezhkite natsionalno-osvoboditelni organizatsii na makedonskite bulgari, 1919-1941* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata akademii na naukite, 1988), 210-234.

¹¹⁶ ODAB, Fond 281K, opis 1, a.e. 3.

direct aid to villages and towns.¹¹⁷ Generally, this was provided through direct contacts between VMRO members and local elites. The latter usually included the mayor and members of governing councils, but might also include local business elites, members of foundations, and the local priest.¹¹⁸

Such aid was sufficient until 1929 to maintain an apparently high level of popular approval. The Depression as it affected Pirin, however, raised dissident voices. As tobacco prices fell and foreign tariffs restricted Bulgarian exports, agricultural centers in Pirin suffered throughout the 1930s.¹¹⁹ Although improved methods spread modernization through other areas of Bulgarian agriculture, tobacco production remained relatively backward into the 1930s.¹²⁰ This issue, taken up left-wing Macedonian organizations now growing in strength once more (the Communist newspaper *Makedonsko zname*, for example, was founded in the mid-1930s) helped to deepen the rifts between the left- and right-wings over 1930-1933, as Ivan Mihailov's organization was now accused of corruption and failing to address the needs of Pirin's inhabitants. This did not discredit all of the Organization's works, let alone its symbolic standing. Aleksandrov was well remembered and a popular figure, for example, as was the "old" VMRO of the

¹¹⁷ Dimitur Tiulekov, "Vutreshnata makedonska revoliutsionna organizatsiya mezhdu ubiistvata na Todor Aleksandrov i Aleksandur Protogerov," in *Natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie na makedonskite i trakiiskite bulgari, 1878-1944: Tom IV, Osvoboditelnite borbi sled purvata svetovna voina, 1919-1944* (Sofia: Makedonski nauchen institut, 2003).

¹¹⁸ ODAB, Fond 63K, a.e. 32, Protocol #205.

¹¹⁹ Note the comments in K.R., "Petrichata na rabota bu poleto," *Makedonski Vesti*, July 1, 1936; also letter by Boris Kostadinov, Kromidovo, "Hliabut v petrichko," *Makedonski Vesti* July 15, 1936, page 4, and Vasil Nikolov, "Kak teche Zhivotut v Gorna Dzhumaiia," *Makedonski Vesti*, August 5, 1936, 1.

¹²⁰ For an overview, see Anastas Beshkov, "Tobacco in Bulgaria," *Economic Geography* 16:2 (April 1940), 188-194.

early 1920s. This period of autonomy was marked by the creation of symbols with “Macedonian feeling” that promoted a feeling of regional consciousness. These symbols would outlast the Organization’s regime in the district, and even the centralizing and authoritarian regimes of the 1930s and 1940s would seek a way to integrate them into Sofia’s efforts at state- and nation-building.

Competing symbols and Contested Consciousness

In 1930, the public primary school in the village of Padezh was renamed in honor of Todor Aleksandrov, as was the local Orthodox Church. In response to state inquiries as to why the village took such actions, the local priest responded both that Aleksandrov was a hero to the people of the village—and that the Organization had provided funding for the school and church, financially supporting the community.¹²¹

VMRO’s deliberate use and creation of “state unifying symbols” and experiences shows boundaries where the state and the Organization’s own regime overlapped. As noted in Chapter One, Anthony Smith argues that the “key experiences” shape the development of national consciousness. He lists:

- Inclusive definition of the collective group, name and homeland;
- Promotion of shared memories and symbols;
- A concept of group inclusion with “common rights and duties;”
- Promotion of a public culture; and
- A public belief in group solidarity.¹²²

¹²¹ ODAB, Fond 63K, a.e. 32, Protocol #276.

¹²² Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations*, 18; Smith, “War and Ethnicity: the Role of Warfare in the Formation, Self-image and Cohesion of Ethnic Communities,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Winter 1981 (4:4), 375. See also Weber, *passim*.

In each respect, VMRO's regime in Pirin was able to take the place of the state in creating experiences and symbols that bound the inhabitants of Pirin together. Specifically, it pursued the myth of "Macedonian suffering" as raised in Chapter Four. In this narrative, Bulgaria's Macedonians were a group unified not simply by local dialect or geography, but their participation in a struggle to build a unified homeland. Such stories of suffering and resistance were reflected in popular representations of the Macedonian movement: for example, the calendars published by the "Ilinden" émigré society in the 1920s (see Figure 11). The theme of struggle is reflected in the chains surrounding the map of Macedonia, which the uniformed guerilla is bursting asunder — thus fitting the slogan above the map of "Undivided Macedonia." The Organization's own history played a prominent role in this myth, justifying its stewardship of the Macedonian movement in Bulgaria in general and its rule over Pirin in specific.

Figure 11
Symbolizing Macedonian Struggle:
The 1926 "Ilinden" Calendar



"Kalendar Ilinden," (Sofia: Ilinden, 1925)

It was the legacy of conflict that helped create a sense of community for Macedonian Bulgarians. One example is the public veneration of VMRO's "cult of the fallen." Frequent public ceremonies and rallies commemorated the sacrifices

of the Balkan and First World Wars. Public funeral processions for slain VMRO members played a similar role.¹²³ Simeon Evtimov's funeral on January 8, 1933 following his death by natural causes is illustrative. Evtimov, a member of Mihailov's inner circle and a VMRO member since before the First World War, received an expansive funeral in Sofia. Hundreds of mourners attended, as depicted in Figure 12, accompanied by a flag-bearing honor guard from the movement's military wing. The coffin was flanked during the ceremony by six-foot wreaths of flowers and young women in folk costume native to Macedonia. An even larger memorial service was held separately in Gorna Dzhumaia.¹²⁴ *Svoboda ili smurt* and *Revolutsionen list* in particular devoted considerable space to obituaries and biographies, interspacing

Figure 12
Symbolic Ceremonies: the funeral of Simeon Evtimov

ПОГРЕБЕНИЕТО НА СИМЕОНЪ ЕВТИМОВЪ



ВЪ СОФИЯ. Погребалното шествие минава по булевардъ Царь Освободител.

VMRO members recently slain with articles on past heroes such as Dame Gruev, Gotse Delchev and (after 1924) Todor Aleksandrov.¹²⁵

Source: *Svoboda ili smurt* 9:140 (January 1933), 2

¹²³ ODAB, Fond 123K, opis 1, a.e. 3, 1925.

¹²⁴ On the funeral, see *Svoboda ili smurt*, 9:140 (January 1933), 1-12.

¹²⁵ It is unusual to see an issue without an article along these lines. By the late 1920s, however, articles on slain VMRO members grew even more frequent. The entire issue of *Svoboda ili Smurt* 6:130 (September 1931), for example, contained articles not only on Aleksandrov, but on ordinary members who had been more recently slain by violence including Yordan Giornov, Evrtim Tashov-

Such public displays of solidarity helped reinforce a sense of community, and a sense of commitment to the Macedonian struggle. Aleksandrov, before his death, had deliberately fostered a populist image. Prints of his color oil portrait (see Figure 13) were distributed for use in local VMRO offices and for the homes of members.¹²⁶ Wearing a field uniform, holding a rifle, and without insignia, the portrait shows him standing as a symbol of all VMRO paramilitary fighters. Aleksandrov moreover insisted in meetings with peasants and VMRO rank-and-file on being addressed as “Todor” or “Chicho” (“Uncle”).¹²⁷ Part of this strategy was a conscious attempt to maintain close connections with émigrés and the Macedonians of Pirin. This is similarly reflected in slogans of the movement, which sought to portray VMRO as synonymous with the Macedonian people:

Long live VMRO!
 Long live a free, unified and undivided Macedonia!
 Long live Todor Aleksandrov!
 Death to the enemies of the Organization!

¹²⁸

Figure 13
 Symbols of VMRO:
 “Chicho” Todor



Image here from cover of Todor Aleksandrov, Dnevnik i Korespondentsiya ot Purvata Svetona Voina 1915-1918g (Sofia: Izdatelstvo Znani OOD, n.d.).

Polski, Georgi Spanchevski, Milan Hristov Stanimirov and Dobri Ivanov Bitel. *Svoboda ili smrt* 9:142 (June 1933) has obituaries on every odd-numbered page from 7 through 15.

¹²⁶ The same portrait is frequently hung in the offices of the contemporary VMRO-SMD political party noted in the introduction.

¹²⁷ TsDA, Fond 1909, opis 2, a.e. 44, l. 1-2.

¹²⁸ TsDA, Fond 1909, opis 2, a.e. 44, l. 2.

Songs, poetry and fiction were created in the same vein, stressing the role of VMRO as an organization and of its memberships in defending the people of Pirin and in fighting to achieve the re-unification of Macedonia. Artwork was commissioned to visualize the Macedonian struggle, as in the “Ilinden” calendar depicted in Figure 10. Just as photographic portraits taken before the First World War celebrated and memorialized both *cheti* individual members as symbolic of the paramilitary struggle against Ottoman rule and rival Greek and Serbian guerillas, similar photographs now portrayed the post-war bands.¹²⁹ Figure 14 can be compared to Figure 6 (Chapter Three, page 120) in order to see how VMRO had changed from its rough guerilla origins before the First World War. Interwar photographs of *cheti* now more portrayed them more like regular soldiers with standardized uniforms and weapons. Such photographs

Figure 14
Interwar Postcard of a VMRO *cheta*



Card circa 1930, personal collection of author

¹²⁹ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2., a.e. 7, l. 25-26.

were not only frequently published in VMRO publications but were now also distributed as prints or as postcards, as shown in Figure 13. Dozens of similar cards can be found in *Fonds 1909* and 396K of the TsDA.

VMRO already possessed its own flag as well, which was now flown prominently at rallies and ceremonies. The organization now transformed the “skull and pistol” symbols of the late nineteenth century into administrative tools. Rubber stamps and seals were created, for example, depicting a skull and crossbones with “*Vutreshna makedonska revoliutsionna organizatsiia*” (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) running along the top border and “*Svoboda ili smertu*” (Freedom or Death) along the bottom.¹³⁰

VMRO’s use of historical symbols or local customs reinforced them as expressions of identity. Such traditions were also cushioned by the failure of the central state apparatus to expand into the region. One example of such was the persistence of local dialect. Unlike Pomaks — whose dialect was sometimes officially referred to as “*pomashki*” Bulgarian¹³¹ — the central government did not specifically recognize the Slavic dialect in Pirin. Provincial school reports suggest that the Pirin dialect was maintained throughout the interwar period.¹³² Local schools had high numbers of failing grades in literary Bulgarian grammar and composition classes. At the Nevrokop coeducational gymnasium, for example, in 1923 significant numbers of students failed their grammar and composition

¹³⁰ Impressions of this stamp can be found at F 370, opis 6, a.e. 356, l. 99.

¹³¹ For example, on language-based central returns in 1920. See F 453, opis 2, a.e. 18, *passim*.

¹³² In addition, letters and petitions in ODAB in the period frequently display grammatical and vocabulary divergences consistent with the local dialect.

course. In the first semester this included two-thirds of the first year students, over a third of the second year and half the third year; in the second semester, this included over half of the first and second years and twelve of thirteen students in the third year.¹³³ In 1924, the trend continued with over half of the first class and second class and two-thirds of the third class failing.¹³⁴ The school itself suggested this was due to a past “irregular period of education” that had failed to prepare students.¹³⁵ But such failure rates did not appear in courses on other subjects.

The creation of new symbols and the retaining of regional particularisms highlight a sense of confusion over national consciousness. VMRO itself added to this confusion with, by the late 1920s, the frequent use of the term “*Makedonskite bulgari*,” or “Macedonian Bulgarians.”¹³⁶ Even as VMRO engaged in state-making, this administrative mobilization failed to resolve completely the question of national consciousness.

VMRO Descending: Factional Disputes and the End of Autonomy

If VMRO was successful in creating symbols and assuming state functions, it was less successful in maintaining internal harmony. As noted in

¹³³ ODAB Fond 164K, opis 1, a.e. 1, 1922, Protocol #1, Protocol #15.

¹³⁴ ODAB Fond 164K, opis 1, a.e. 1, 1924, Protocol #5.

¹³⁵ ODAB Fond 164K, opis 1, a.e. 1, 1922, Protocol #1.

¹³⁶ The term can be seen in VMRO’s periodicals; see, for example, *Svoboda ili smurt*, August 1, 1929, 5:98, page 13; also *Revoluutsonen list*, November 1933, page 2. Yet earlier that year, *Svoboda ili smurt* had used the expression ““Macedonians for the Bulgarian state,” suggesting internal inconsistency or uncertainty about the use of the term. See *Svoboda ili smurt*, May 17, 1929 5:93, page 1.

Chapter Two, since its founding the Macedonian paramilitary movement had been subject to factionalization: initially between Supremacists and VMRO, then (following their union in 1902) between left and right wings in the movement. Individual *cheti*, too, were generally loyal to their band leader rather than to an abstract hierarchy. This tendency continued when VMRO was rebuilt after the First World War, when (as noted in Chapter Four) elements of Yane Sandanski's "Seres group" sided with Stamboliiski's government against Todor Aleksandrov's VMRO. Finally, as noted above, an open break emerged in the post-war Organization when Ivan Mihailov took up power following Aleksandrov's assassination. Open violence broke out in 1924-1925, subsiding to sporadic fighting between factions dedicated to Mihailov and Aleksandur Protogerov.

Within the mainstream VMRO led by Mihailov, the result was an increased atmosphere of paranoia and a hunt for internal enemies. Mihailov cracked down on Communist organizations in Pirin, particularly after Dimitur Vlahov and other left-wing members broke away from the organization and founded VMRO-*Obedenie* (VMRO-United). Their small numbers were forced first out of Pirin to Sofia and then out of Bulgaria altogether to Vienna. Mihailov nonetheless blamed the Communists for Aleksandrov's assassination and pursued them ruthlessly.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 86. See also *Makedoniiia*, issue 45 of December 3, 1926, page 1, for typical anti-communist rhetoric. On May 9, 1925 Mihailov's lover, Mencha Karnicheva, assassinated Todor Panitsa in a Viennese theater. Mihailov later married her, and she was famed as the "Joan of Arc" of the interwar VMRO.

Pro-Communist accounts of the conflict from the Macedonian perspective are given in Ivan Katarjiev, *Pirin se budi i buni* (Skopje: Misla, 1983), 188-256, and in Michael Michael A. Radin, *VMRO and the Macedonian Question, 1893-1934* (Skopje: Kultura, 1993), *passim*; from the Bulgarian perspective, in Galchin, *ibid.*

Faced with significant dissent within the Macedonian movement, the response of the Mihailov group was to sanction violence against all dissident factions on the pretext of “reacting to attacks” by these groups.¹³⁸ The Central Committee off VMRO became increasingly worried about local non-communist rivals, and members were ordered to be vigilant against for local rivals.¹³⁹ Mihailov ordered attacks and assassinations against any possible rival.

As the rift between the two wings of VMRO continued, however, Mihailov “exported” violence form Pirin to the rest of Bulgaria. His ability to dominate VMRO, and the Organization’s own regime in Pirin forced dissidents within the movement to flee either abroad (particularly to Vienna) or to Sofia. The result was an escalation of conflict in which VMRO gunmen from each wing were dispatched to undertake assassinations within the capital, members of the parliament included.¹⁴⁰ As killings in Sofia grew more frequent and more apt to take place in the open, sympathies for the Organization on the national level declined.¹⁴¹ By the early 1930s, open violence between the two groups created

A more balanced if sympathetic approach is Andrew Rossos, “Macedonianism and Macedonian Nationalism on the Left,” in Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery, eds., *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). A more general approach covering both the left and the right is Tsvetlana Micheva, “Ideino razvitie na VMRO sled Purvata svetovna voina (1919-1944): Chast purva, 1919-1928 g.,” *Istoricheski Pregled* 57:3-4 (2001), 78-91.

¹³⁸ TsDA, fond 396, opis 1, a.e. 2, l 50-76.

¹³⁹ TsDA, Fond 396K, opis 2, a.e. 17, l. 117-119.

¹⁴⁰ Shoemaker, Sofia, February 15, 1933 dispatch #603, RIAB 10/44, 3.

¹⁴¹ The American Legation records for Bulgaria are particularly useful, as outside observers chronicling the rise and extent of VMRO-involved assassinations and violence. A number of dispatches dealt either with a specific act of assassination, or chronicled recent events: these include (all by Henry W. Henry W. Shoemaker, Sofia to the Department of State, Washington D.C.): February 15, 1933, #603;

popular dissatisfaction with Mihailov in Pirin.¹⁴² Socialist and Communist agitation in the province surged following the slump of the tobacco industry. Although Mihailov persecuted unions as they formed, VMRO failed to offer any alternative.

By the early 1930s, such violence targeted even government authorities. On January 27, 1933, four members of the gendarmerie were escorting a train carrying three prisoners accused of robbing and shooting a local schoolteacher in Pirin. Near Belitsa the train was stopped and boarded by a local VMRO *cheta*. The gendarmes were forcibly disarmed and the prisoners kidnapped, given a summary trial and then shot at the train station.¹⁴³ VMRO's ability to subvert free elections in Pirin in the late 1920s without government reprisal raised similar concerns.¹⁴⁴ Autonomy for Pirin had emerged as an open challenge to Sofia's ability to maintain order. But the open conflict between Mihailovist and other factions served to weaken the movement sufficiently that by the early 1930s the Bulgarian army officers aligned with the *Zveno* group felt confident enough to declare VMRO illegal as part of the coup of 1934.

March 10, 1930, #1613; December 18, 1930, #168; February 21, 1931, #196; July 24, 1931, #264; July 13, 1932, #469; May 20, 1933, #663; June 23, #692, 1933. RIAB 10/44. See also Markov, 256-265.

¹⁴² Foreign diplomats commented widely on the increasing trend of violence in the later years. See, for example, Henry W. Shoemaker, Sofia to the Department of State, Washington D.C., 20 May, 1933, dispatch #663, 2 - 3. RIAB 10/44; Henry W. Shoemaker, Sofia to the Department of State, Washington D.C., 23 June, 1933, dispatch #692, 1. RIAB 10/44; and Henry W. Shoemaker, Sofia, to the Department of State, Washington D.C., 25 June, 1933, telegram. RIAB 10/44.

¹⁴³ Shoemaker, Sofia, February 15, 1933 dispatch #603, RIAB 10/44, 4.

¹⁴⁴ For a generally sympathetic survey of the work of the Macedonian Parliamentary Group, see Dimitur Tolekov, "Deinostta na makedonskata parlamentarna grupa v XXII i XXIII obiknovenno Narodno subranie (1927 – 1934 g.), *Makedonski pregled* 24:1 (2001), 23-44.

The weak presence of the Bulgarian state in the Pirin region limited the state's ability to promote its preferred, uniform Bulgarian identity, the Bulgarian language included. True, the central government was able to extend infrastructure and formal government rule throughout the region during 1923-1934. But VMRO, in its role as the "local regime," assumed much of the state's role in identity-building; the central state could not obtain or maintain its monopoly there. In education and local administration in particular, the Organization subverted formal government to its own ends. Schools and municipal and village governments accepted the patronage of VMRO leaders, who successfully portrayed the organization as attentive to the social welfare of the district's inhabitants. By 1933, the organization apparently went so far as to flirt with the concept of creating its own independent Macedonian state.¹⁴⁵ Only in 1934 did the state act to drive VMRO underground and begin its own policy of centralization, a policy that was to continue through the assumption of power by the Fatherland Front and the early Communist period.

¹⁴⁵ The idea of a "Macedonian state" is raised briefly in the account of the 1933 General Congress of the organization. See *Svoboda ili Smurt*, February 1933, 9:140 (1933), 7-11.

Chapter 6

Establishing Central Control, 1934-1945

“...the government [intends] to put an end to the extra-legal rule of the
Macedonian organizations in [Petrich]...”
— Frederick Sterling, US *charge d'affairs*, Sofia, 1934¹

In May 1934 the Ministry of War and Ministry of Internal affairs dispatched units of the Bulgarian army and gendarmerie to Pirin under orders to dismantle VMRO, arrest its supporters and establish government control over the province. Pirin was occupied without significant conflict between the troops and VMRO *cheti*, at least in part because the movement’s internal conflicts had weakened its local support and diminished its paramilitary forces. The leader of the Organization’s Central Committee, Ivan Mihailov, now fled into exile in Fascist Italy. Police dragnets swept up much of the remaining leadership. After decades of paramilitary dominance over the region, the government restored central control within a few weeks.

What the US legation found remarkable at the time was the apparent ease of the operation. A *coup d'etat* on May 19 by the Military League (*Voenen suiuz*) and the People’s Union “Link” (*Naroden suiuz zveno*, hereafter referred to as Zveno), overthrew the existing government and took power. Where the Liapchev

¹ Frederick A. Sterling, Sofia to the Department of State, Washington D.C., June 11, 1934, #23, 3, *Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of Bulgaria 1910-1944*, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington D.C., cited here from the National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1982 edition, microform #1207, 21 reels.

and *Naroden Blok* regimes had previously been unable to stem the tide of Macedonian violence in the face of VMRO's military and political power, the new government — ruling by dictatorial “emergency decree” — established control over Pirin quickly and with little open violence.²

In the history of Pirin itself, the *coup* of 1934 has been variously portrayed as a betrayal of VMRO, an attempt to subjugate the region's Macedonian population, or as a campaign to eliminate outright a destabilizing criminal organization.³ It is more accurate to say that the seizure of power was an attempt, continued by successive regimes, to assert the state's control over Pirin. *Zveno*'s campaign in Pirin was also part of a larger effort to create a non-party regime that would control political life in the country under the direction of the central government and ministries in Sofia. The *coup* was successful in launching a period of continued centralization and authoritarianism. Administrative, economic and political functions in Pirin were increasingly brought under the direction of Sofia. Each of the regimes that followed in the ensuing “decade of centralization” continued the process.⁴

This political direction was not confined to the Bulgarian government's tightening of control over Pirin or even over the country as a whole. In the Southeastern European states central power had expanded at the expense of the provinces since independence. Both Stefan Stambolov in the 1880s and King

² Sterling, *ibid*, 4.

³ See, respectively, Tiulekov, *Obrecheno Rodoliubie, passim*, for a pro-VMRO perspective; Vasil Jotevski, 26, on subjugation; finally, note the dispatches of Frederick A. Sterling, Sofia to the Department of State, Washington D.C., May 22, 1934 letter [confidential], RIAB 10/44, 3.

⁴ Roumen Daskalov, “Reactions to Balkan Modernization,” 56.

Ferdinand in the 1890s and after 1908 had attempted to concentrate power in a central Bulgarian government directed by the cabinet of ministers. But the role of elected parliaments had persisted across the region, buoyed by liberal constitutions enacted after the First World War. Then the economic depression confronted them all with the political instability and sense of crisis that had already opened the way for VMRO in Bulgaria during the 1920s. Each Southeastern European state sought to solve this crisis by a turn to authoritarian dictatorship, setting parliaments aside and accelerating the pace of centralization.⁵ What distinguished the Southeastern European experience from that of Italy and Germany was that these dictatorships did not profess to seek revolutionary change but a continued, a basically conservative attempt to consolidate and establish the centralization of power.⁶

In similar fashion, historians have focused on how the coup of September 9, 1944 brought the Communist Bulgarian Workers' Party (Bulgarska

⁵ For a survey of these trends in interwar Southeastern Europe in each country, see Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983). A recent synthetic approach is John Lampe, *The Balkans into Southeastern Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 79-97.

⁶ However the Fascists or NSDAP felt regarding the power and authority of the regimes they opposed after the First World War, they remained strong, centralized states. Centralization was less a matter of centralizing government structure — with the exception of the deliberate undermining of the power of the *Länder* in Germany in 1934 — but rather the consolidation of power in the hands of the party and dictator.

Christian Nielssen makes a similar argument with regards to Yugoslavia, where the establishment of a dictatorship by King Aleksandar was an attempt to *create* central power more than an attempt at either personal control or “Greater Serbianism.” See Christian Nielssen, “One State, One Nation, One King: The Dictatorship of King Aleksandar and His Yugoslav Project, 1929-1935” (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2002).

rabotnicheska partiia, hereafter BRP)⁷ to power at the head of the Fatherland Front, and established dictatorial Communist control over Pirin (as with other parts of Bulgaria).⁸ As discussed below, the Fatherland Front ceded considerable autonomy to local party organizations in Pirin and elsewhere in its period of initial weakness at the end of the Second World War. In Pirin, thus, the establishment of centralized control after 1946 appears as a continuation of earlier policies by the dictatorial regimes of *Zveno* and Tsar Boris to establish administrative control. Focusing on the “ultimate” goals of the Communists by both Marxist and revisionist historiography hides real continuities in how power was actually used following *Zveno coup*.

In Pirin from 1934 forward the state now sought in unprecedented ways to foster a single Bulgarian consciousness. Whereas from 1923 to 1934 VMRO had controlled what Anthony Smith terms the “experience of administrative mobilization,” the state would now shape the symbols and memories integral to local identity — and recast them in such fashion as to encourage a common Bulgarian national consciousness.⁹

⁷ Driven underground, the Bulgarian Communist Party used a variety of “front” names to continue to operate in politics. Technically, the party was called the Bulgarskata Rabotnicheska Partiia (Komunisti) from 1938-1948. This study uses “Bulgarian Workers’ Party” and “Communists” interchangeably, except in citation or giving formal titles where the contemporary name is given.

⁸ Bulgarskata Komunisticheska Partiia, *Istoriia na BKP v Blagoevgradska oblast* (Blagoevgrad: Partizan, 1983), 3.

⁹ This argument mirrors those in Macedonian historiography on the role of the state regarding “denationalization” state campaigns in Pirin: e.g., Vasil Jotevski *Natsionalnata afirmatsija na makedontsite vo pirinskiot del na Makedonija, 1944-1948* (Skopje: Institut za natsionalna istorija, 1996), 1-33. However, this study assumes that all states influence national consciousness.

The Coup of 1934 and the Tsarist Dictatorship of 1935

As argued in Chapter Five, systemic state weakness had helped VMRO obtain administrative autonomy over Pirin after 1923. This same weakness of the state (and the concurrent political and economic causes) fostered a sense of crisis that led to the *coup* of May 19, 1934. In principle, the League claimed legitimacy for its actions through invoking article 43 of the 1879 Turnovo constitution. This article gave the Tsar the authority to form an emergency government in circumstances when parliament could not address external or internal threats to the existence of the state.¹⁰ The Military League announced a non-political “government of the ministries” under a prime minister with emergency powers.

The League seized power in cooperation with *Zveno*, a small cross-party political group drawing members from the military and several of the major political parties.¹¹ *Zveno* was a movement founded in 1930 that drew from both political and military circles with the proposition that mass party politics had failed to solve Bulgaria’s problems.¹² The *Zveno* cabinet created under the conservative political figure Prime Minister Kimon Stoianov drew members with backgrounds as diverse as serving Army officers in the Military League, the

¹⁰ Vasil Giozelev, ed., *Bulgarskata durzhavnost v aktove i dokumenti* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo “Nauka i izkustvo,” 1981), 223.

¹¹ Confusingly, it was possible for an individual to be a member of both *Zveno* and the League at the same time, such as General Petur Zlatev. Bulgarian historiography usually treats *Zveno* as the dominant group, but the defection by the League ultimately led to the government’s demise. Note Milen Kumanov and Tania Nikolova, *Politicheski Partii*, 102-103.

¹² Daskalov, 234-235. For an overview, see Milen Kumanov and Tania Nikolova, *Politicheski partii, organizatsii i dvizheniya v Bulgaria i tehnite lideri, 1879-1999* (Sofia: Ariadna, 1999), 102-103.

Radical Party, the Democratic Party, the Agrarians, Aleksandur Tsankov's National Socialist Society and the *Sgovor* coalition of 1923.¹³

In response to the economic and political crisis in the country, Zveno proclaimed an éstatist agenda that drew inspiration from Italian corporatism. State management of the economy, politics and society was to be the solution to Bulgaria's current crisis. Such an approach would "direct the spiritual and intellectual life of the country towards union and renovation for the benefit of the nation and of the state" and "organiz[e] the citizens into an ideologically homogenous national group."¹⁴ The Zveno government enacted enabling legislation in each of these three areas. In politics, for example, the Law for the Dissolution of Political Party Organizations (*Zakon za razturiane na partiino-politicheskite organizatsii*) of June 14, 1934 formally dissolved all political parties. In three separate articles, the law restricted political organization, publishing and newspapers, and gave the MVRNZ (Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health) police powers over all groups of a political character.¹⁵ A separate announcement on June 19 formally nationalized the property of all former political parties for state use.¹⁶

¹³ See Tasho Tashev, *Ministrite na Bulgariia, 1879-1999* (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov" and Izdalelstvo na Ministerstvo na otbranata "Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets," 1999).

¹⁴ Cited from the translated attachment of Zveno's proclamations on taking power in Shoemaker, Sofia to Washington D.C., dispatch #23, June 11, 1934. RIAB 10/44.

¹⁵ *Zakon za razturiane na partiino-politicheskite organizatsii na 14 Iuni, 1934; Bulgarskata durzhavnost*, 314.

¹⁶ "Iz naredba za otnemane v polza na durzhavata imotite na nelegalnite organizatsii, utvurdena s ukaz #64," *Bulgarskata durzhavnost*, 314.

Zveno similarly attempted to rationalize state structure. The existing 16 administrative provinces of Bulgaria were reorganized into seven new provinces with the aim of reducing local political networks. This would, as noted below, be used to divide the existing Petrich *oblast* between new provinces centered on Sofia and Plovdiv. Village communes were similarly combined into a smaller number of larger units. The central ministries would now appoint local administrators directly from the capital. To this end an accompanying purge fired a third of the country's civil servants, allowing the ministries to replace those insufficiently subordinate to control from Sofia.

These measures set the stage for *Zveno*'s intervention into the economy. While every post-war Bulgarian government had favored state intervention, *Zveno* went farther in drawing on (if not replicating precisely) Italian Fascist economic experiments. The various economic ministries were combined into one body, with similar mergers between state and private banks. The experiment with corporatism culminated in the government's creation of the Bulgarian Workers' Union (*Bulgarski rabotnicheski suiuz*), a body in which citizens would be divided into "estates" in imitation of the Italian system.¹⁷ *Zveno* extended state power into the social sphere through the creation on June 9 of the Directorate for Social Renewal (*Direktoriiia na obshchestvenata obnova*). Its responsibility was the fostering of "national spirit" through the censorship of the press, publications, theater, cinema and public gatherings. These measures accompanied *Zveno*'s efforts to eliminate the threat of political disorder. Not only were the Communist

¹⁷ On *Zveno*'s drawing on Italian Fascism as a model, see Daskalov, *Bulgarskoto Obshestvo*, 207-208.

Party and VMRO declared illegal, but so were all political parties as well as any other public organization that failed to meet with *Zveno*'s approval.

Given the small membership of *Zveno*, however, its government lacked a base of popular support and largely failed to secure one — the reason power had to be seized through a *coup* backed by the military. Conflicts within *Zveno* and the Military League of leading officers over the new reforms resulted in the fall of Stoianov's government within six months. Tsar Boris readily approved the new government headed by the Military League's General Petur Zlatev in January 1935. *Zveno*'s crucial military support now passed to the Tsar, allowing him to control the installation of two more governments in April and November 1935.¹⁸ The government of Prime Minister Georgi Kioseivanov in November marks the final transition to a "royal dictatorship" in which Boris used his personal influence to install and control otherwise weak governments that ruled by decree.

The more ambitious corporatist plans of *Zveno* were now sidelined. Boris' dictatorship was conservative, stressing the maintenance of existing elites, economic models and traditions. The minor Fascist movements of the extreme right, such as the *Ratnitsi*, were outlawed in April 1939. The royalist dictatorship, like the dictatorships of King Aleksandur in Yugoslavia, King Carol in Romania and of General Metaxas in Greece, were fundamentally attempts to secure domestic stability favorable to the elites within and surrounding the royal court. At most, Boris initiated a limited rearmanent of the Bulgarian army and flirted with the idea of attempting to regain some of the territories lost in the Balkan and First

¹⁸ Statelova, 539.

World Wars. Boris continued the initiatives attempts to bring the provinces under central control, to promote propaganda instilling national spirit (now featuring a sense of loyalty to the monarch himself) and to use police powers to suppress any opposition.

Establishing Centralized Control over Pirin

Zveno had expressed dissatisfaction with VMRO's hold over Pirin prior to the *coup* of 1934.¹⁹ VMRO's role in Bulgarian political affairs had limited the government's freedom to improve relations with Greece and Yugoslavia. Worse, its control over Pirin both weakened the government's authority and provided it with a base from which its paramilitary forces could intervene against the government, as they had in 1923. VMRO's earlier flirtation with the Comintern and with an autonomous Macedonia posed its own potential problems. These resurfaced with rumors that delegates at VMRO's 1933 General Congress in Gorna Dzhumaiia considered declaring for a unified Macedonia independent of Bulgaria.²⁰

Immediately after taking power, *Zveno* and the Military League dispatched both army and gendarmerie units to Pirin to confiscate weapons and to begin the process of dismantling VMRO.²¹ The move was surprisingly effective. The dominant wing of the movement behind Ivan Mihailov fled into exile or went

¹⁹ TsDA, fond 370, op 6, a.e. 87, I 35.

²⁰ Shoemaker, Sofia, February 15, 1933 dispatch #603, RIAB 10/44, 5.

²¹ Tiulekov, 234.

underground as the government proceeded with widespread arrests.²² The smaller, rival “Protogerov” wing composed of those opposing Mihailov’s leadership of the movement officially dissolved itself. The small communist VMRO-United (*Obedenie*) faction went underground as well, with much of the leadership going abroad. No large-scale armed opposition was reported, but the Ministry of Internal Affairs directed both national and local police to monitor any subversive behavior in Pirin. VMRO was now on the same level as the Communists. The state apparatus used to repress the BKP since 1923, as noted in Chapter Five, was now extended to cover the Macedonian movement.²³ Both groups would be subject to continual police monitoring from 1934-1944.²⁴

The government’s campaign of 1934 resulted in the arrest of hundreds of VMRO members and supporters. The resulting interrogation and investigation provided the police with leads on numerous murders, assassinations, bombings and other acts committed by members of the movement.²⁵ Government seizure of the movement’s bank accounts, records and arms caches crippled its ability to resist. Such caches included 15 machine guns, nearly 11,000 rifles, over 700,000 rounds of ammunition and 8,000 hand grenades.²⁶ The Organization’s

²² ODAB, F 61K, opis 1, a.e. 23.

²³ For the national police, note the directives in TsDA fond 370, opis 6, a.e. 3790 (refugees), 406, 411, 500, 503 (VMRO) and 587 and 742 (Macedonian societies.) For district police, see ODAB F63K, opis 3, a.e. 8., which contains the investigations on both communists and VMRO. Not only VMRO but also associated groups were under police supervision.

²⁴ Zveno directed the police to monitor both organizations: ODAB, F 61K, opis 1, a.e. 23.

²⁵ ODAB, fond 63K, opis 1, a.e. 1a.

²⁶ ODAB, fond 136k, opis 1, a.e. 29, l 146.

records revealed who had been part of its administration of the province,²⁷ allowing Sofia to purge local government offices in Pirin of VMRO-sympathizers. Sporadic violence continued into the late 1930s, such as the assassination of General Iordan Peev in Sofia, targeted for his role in the crackdown. But VMRO had lost its power to run Pirin as an autonomous unit.²⁸

Figure 15
Bulgarian Administrative Borders, 1934:
The former Petrich *oblast* is divided between new Sofia and Plovdiv *oblasts*;
the four *okolii* are noted.



Based on Bulgarskata akademia na naukite: Geografski institut, *Atlas Narodna Republika Bulgaria* (Sofia: Glavno upravlenie po geodeziia i kartografiiia pri ministerstvoto na akrhitektura i blagoustroistvoto, 1973), 7 ; and "Karta Bulgariia novo administrativno delenie, novo naimonovaniia na selishtata," (Sofia: Pechatnitsa "Stopansko razvitie," 1934), enclosed map.

²⁷ Examples from the files in ODAB, fond 63K, opis 1, a.e. 1a. include a Nikola Stoianov Toluzov officer in the local militia in Simitli (I 27); Spas Krustoev, mayor of Krupnik in the early 1920s and Kostadin Hlebarov, a police agent (I 14).

²⁸ It did not, however, lose its power to destabilize international affairs, as the assassination of Yugoslav King Alexander and French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou illustrate. Although primarily an operation by the Croatian Ustaše, the triggerman was Vlado Chernozemski, a VMRO member and bodyguard to Ivan Mihailov.

With the gendarmerie and army providing security, the government soon took steps to re-establish administrative control over the district. In June, as part of government's rationalization of Bulgaria, the borders of the Petrich *oblast* were redrawn. The *okolii* (districts) of Gorna Dzhumaiia, Petrich and Sandanski areas were transferred to the Sofia *oblast*, those of Razlog and Nevrokop to the Plovdiv district: see Figure 15. This was done deliberately to divide the region, further weakening local political groups and institutions. With administrative positions now firmly under control of the central authorities, local civil servants, educators and others were evaluated and monitored. Functions that had been left to local authorities were restored to the purview of the central government.

This included the creation and promotion of symbols relevant to national consciousness. The Macedonian-Adrianople Volunteers' Society noted in Chapter Three was founded in 1934 specifically to replace VMRO and émigré associations. While a local Macedonian consciousness in Pirin would be tolerated, Sofia sought to link its history to that of a Bulgarian national consciousness and the Bulgarian state. For example, in 1937 a monument was dedicated in Sveti Vrach to the Bulgarian Second Army's campaigns in the First World War. The ceremony made no mention of the role of VMRO paramilitary units. The minister of war and members of the general staff were the most prominent attendees, the event covered by the popular press both nationally and in Pirin.²⁹ Additional military monuments were erected around the region to memorialize individual or group heroics and sacrifice in the "Macedonian

²⁹ *Pirinski Glas*, September 14, 1938, page 1-2.

Liberation Struggle," Balkan Wars and First World Wars.³⁰ Unlike the 1920s, as noted in Chapter Five, when VMRO had been left to erect local monuments and ceremonies and thus shape local memories in Pirin, the government now took the leading role.

The Law for the Dissolution of Political Party Organizations had rendered the majority of Macedonian organizations and periodicals illegal, both within and outside Pirin. The Macedonian youth, women and student organizations were closed down.³¹ Only the Macedonian Scientific Institute (*Makedonskiyat nauchni institut*, or MNI) in Sofia was allowed to remain open without interruption through the purge.³² A new series of student and cultural organizations were permitted, often founded in cooperation with the MNI, but with careful government supervision. Within Pirin controls were even stricter, although strikes over the wages of tobacco workers raised the specter of illegal union activity.³³

Youth and cultural organizations were organized through the government and monitored for any political activity. VMRO's newspaper offices were closed. Not until 1935, after the royal dictatorship was imposed, were new papers allowed to publish in the district, and then under censorship. *Pirinski Glas*, one of two new papers, stated from its first issue that its goal was to foster "a Bulgarian

³⁰ On war memorials in Pirin, see Petko Yotov, Sonia Dimitrova, Daniela Tsankova-Gancheva, *Voenni pametnitsi v Bulgaria* (Sofia: Nationsnalen voennoistoricheski muzei and MINALO, 2003), 9-15

³¹ Dimitur Michev, "Natsionalnoosvoboditelnoto dvizhenie sled devetnadsetomaiskiia voenen prevrat," in Michev, *Natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto dvizhenie*, 309.

³² Dimitur Gotsev, *Makedonskata Intelligentsia v perioda 1919-1941 g.* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 2006), 308.

³³ BKP, *Istoriia na BKP*, 205; Petur Galchin, *Politicheskite borbi v Pirinskiiat krai, 1923-1939* (Sofia: Partizdat, 1989), 165-166.

spirit.³⁴ Tsar Boris' picture dominated the first issue's front page and was regularly featured afterwards, suggesting the paper's purpose was as much to foster loyalty to the Tsar and the dynasty as it was to the nation.

Pirinski glas sought to shape memory and identity in forms prescribed by the central government. Themes common in *Svoboda ili smurt* or *Revolutionen list* continued. The new newspaper featured articles on local history, including the activities of VMRO before the First World War, as well as prominent VMRO members of the late nineteenth century.³⁵ Such historical presentations were, however, usually linked to Bulgarian history in general, or accompanied by specific articles on figures such as the nineteenth century Bulgarian hero Vasil Levski.³⁶ Articles stressed the pace of modernization and the progress of Pirin under the new regime.³⁷ While Pirin Macedonia could retain its unique history and local identities, it would be the central government that would define this history and national consciousness. Such definitions were still unfinished in the 1940s, when the government was faced not only with the question of firmly incorporating Pirin into a Bulgarian national consciousness, but incorporating Vardar and Aegean Macedonia as well. For the fourth time in less than 30 years, the country entered war in an attempt to unify all of geographic Macedonia into a Bulgarian state.

³⁴ *Pirinski Glas*, December 12, 1937, page 1.

³⁵ For example, "Gotse Delchev," *Pirinski Glas*, June 8, 1938, page 1; and "Ilinden: po sluchai 35 godishninata," August 8, 1938, page 1.

³⁶ For example, the article on Vasil Levski. Kosta Minchev, "Vasil Levski," *Pirinski Glas* September 3, 1938, page 1; and on Hristo Botev, "Hristo Botev," *Pirinski Glas* June 8, 1938, page 1.

³⁷ *Pirinski Glas*, February 2, 1938, page 2-3.

Bulgaria's Road to the Second World War

Although Tsar Boris' government maintained claims to regaining the extensive territorial losses inflicted by the peace treaties of 1913 and 1919, it was reluctant to engage in aggressive diplomacy before the Second World War to revise Bulgaria's territorial losses from the Balkan and First World Wars. The Balkan Entente, signed in 1934 between Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia reinforced Bulgaria's isolation. Bulgaria was similarly caught between the Great Powers, as Germany, Great Britain and the Soviet Union each took an active interest in the orientation of Bulgaria's foreign policy.³⁸ Tsar Boris' first response was to declare neutrality in 1939 at the outbreak of the war and attempt to steer a course around the conflict. Fearing both Communist and Fascist political rivals at home, Boris attempted to avoid close entanglement with either Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union.

Nazi efforts proved sufficient to pull Bulgaria into a pro-German position by 1941.³⁹ "Clearing arrangements" between the two countries were the only profitable way to export Bulgaria's agricultural goods. By 1939 this resulted in sufficient leverage to entangle Bulgaria firmly within the Nazi economic sphere. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of that August increased the pressure, as Germany and the Soviet Union agreed to divide Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. Soviet suggestions of a closer alliance with Bulgaria in early 1940 could only be

³⁸ The British hoped to see Bulgaria join the Balkan Entente; the Germans hoped for a pro-German entrance into the Axis, while the Soviets sought to make Bulgaria part of a "Soviet security sphere."

³⁹ Note Evgeniia Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *Bulgarskite prehodi 1939-2005* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2006), 14-20.

countered by turning to the Germans or the British, with the latter unwilling (or unable) to counterbalance the Soviets. It was, however, the events of the summer of 1940 that proved crucial. The speed and apparent ease of Germany's victory over France in May 1940 made clear the Reich's military supremacy. A German-sponsored round of diplomacy in August resulted in the September 7 Treaty of Craiova by which Bulgaria regained the southern Dobrudzha from Romania. It suggested that alliance with Germany could potentially reap further revisions in Bulgarian borders.

Accordingly, on March 1, 1941, Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact as an ally of Germany. The agreement promised still greater German access to agricultural supplies and immediate transit rights for the *Wehrmacht* across the country. Bulgaria still refrained from providing troops for combat in German military campaigns, though under pressure from Berlin it would make what the Tsar saw as token declarations of war on the United States and United Kingdom in December 1941 — while refraining from any declaration of war on the Soviet Union, which maintained diplomatic relations with Bulgaria until 1944. Bulgarian troops did not actively participate in the German Operation Punishment against Yugoslavia and Operation Marita against Greece on April 6, 1941. In an agreement reached over April 18-20, however, Nazi representatives did invite the Bulgarian Army to contribute to occupation duties (see Figure 16, next page) in both Vardar and Aegean Macedonia.

These zones of occupation initially included Yugoslavia's Vardar Macedonia along a line running from Pirot, Vrania and Skopje. Following the

German conquest of Greece, it would also include and Greece's territories in Western Thrace and eastern Aegean Macedonia (between the Mesta and Struma rivers).⁴⁰ Two Bulgarian divisions (including the 7th Rila Division) were immediately dispatched to Vardar to take up occupation duties after the government announced a formal declaration of a “state of war” within the occupied zones on April 24. Their mission in 1941 was chiefly to maintain local order and to supplement the limited number of troops the Germans could leave to guard the Belgrade-Thessaloniki rail line and Thessaloniki itself. Bulgarian occupation troops did not serve under German commanders or count in the German order of battle, although there was some cooperation between the two military commands.

World War Two as a Struggle Between Centralization and Decentralization

Throughout the occupation, Bulgaria was able to unify all three regions of Macedonia administratively for the first time since the brief and narrower mandate of 1912. For the Bulgarian government, occupation was a vehicle by which Macedonia could be defined as Bulgarian and unified with the Bulgarian state, allowing for a definitive state-sponsored solution to the unification of most of the Macedonian lands with Bulgaria. But emerging conflicts within these occupied regions meant that *rival* theories of reunification would emerge as well.

⁴⁰ A smaller area in Aegean Macedonia north in Thessalonika, as depicted in Figure 16, was transferred to Bulgarian occupation in early 1944 as the Germans grew desperate to conserve manpower. The Germans also maintained control over the border with Turkey in Western Thrace, as depicted in Figure 14.

Although the Second World War did not directly affect Pirin to any large measure, the conflict in geographic Macedonia shaped Pirin's political culture.



Just as the Bulgarian government sought to impose administrative control over Pirin after 1934 its authorities in Sofia now discouraged local autonomous groups in occupied Vardar and Aegean Macedonia. Shortly after occupation sympathetic locals had begun establishing Bulgarian Central Action Committees (*Bulgarski tsentralni aktsionni komiteti*) in Vardar to represent the local Macedonian population's interests to German, Italian and Bulgarian occupation authorities.⁴¹ Such institutions initially filled the administrative vacuum created when the predominantly ethnically Serbian authorities of the Yugoslav

⁴¹ Petrov, 10. Dobrin Michev, "Ustanoviavane I deinost na bulgarskata vlast vuv Vardarska Makedoniia," in Michev, *Natsionalno-osvoboditelnoto Dvizhenie Tom 4*, 341-343.

government in Vardar fled or were arrested by the Germans. Already, by July 7, 1941 the newly appointed district governor from Bulgaria declared that the action committees were to be dissolved and replaced by officials formally appointed by Sofia.⁴²

The new regional government established in Vardar Macedonia, integrated as the Skopje *oblast* in 1943, was the same sort of regime installed in Pirin in 1934. It centralized and expanded schools, local administration, state theaters and publications. But in failing even to inquire about local interests, these institutions were met with increasing hostility by the local population. Macedonian historiography still considers the period to be an outright “Bulgarianization campaign.”⁴³ It may just as well be regarded as a “centralization campaign” in which the government in Sofia attempted to establish control over local governance in Vardar and Aegean Macedonia. The lasting symbol of this campaign has been the presence of Bulgarian occupation forces (see Figure 17, next page) rather than gains in social welfare.

Given the needs of the wartime state, administrative control increased over time throughout Bulgaria and the occupied lands. The Law for Requisitions, passed in March 23, 1939, authorized the government to commandeer material

⁴² Michev, *ibid.*, 345-346.

⁴³ Vanche Stojchev, *Bulgarskiot okupatsiski sistem vo Makedonija, 1941-1944* (Skopje: Grigor Prlichev, 1996), 181-185; see also Gjorji Malkovski, *Bugarskata fashistichka organizatsija “Branik” vo Makedonija (1941-1944)* (Skopje: Institut za natsionalna istorija, 1992), 17-19. The traditional Bulgarian historiographical position is illustrated in Kostadin Paleshutski, *Makedonskiyat vupros v burzhoazna Jugoslaviia 1918-1941* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata akademiiia na naukite, 1983), 47-77.

Figure 17
Aspects of Centralization:
Bulgarian Troops on Occupation Duty, Vardar Macedonia, 1943



Photo from personal collection; original marked
Kriegsberichter Ardt, Serie 1567a

necessary for the war. Pirin was called upon to support an economy brought increasingly under army control.⁴⁴ The Law for Urban Mobilization of May 4, 1940 similarly allowed the government to intake adult men over 16 for military service.⁴⁵ The Bulgarian government integrated Pirin into the war economy on a general level, but its strategic importance prompted additional consideration. Pirin lay across routes to the occupied territories in both Vardar and Aegean Macedonia, and the easiest rail and road corridor to Western Thrace. Local rail lines saw increasing use by the army, and new military lines were built from Gorna Dzhumaiia to Kochani, in Vardar. The existing rail line to Aegean

⁴⁴ *Bulgarskata durzhavnost*, 119.

⁴⁵ *Bulgarskata durzhavnost*, 121. The draft would be extended to the occupied territories during occupation.

Macedonia was expanded to handle additional traffic, with new links being added between Aegean and Vardar Macedonia at Demirhisar.⁴⁶

Figure 18

Bulgarian Administrative Borders, 1943

A Pirin province is restored in the Gorna Dzhumaia *oblast*, and a Skopje *oblast* is created. (Shaded territories are acquisitions during the war).



Based on Bulgarskata akademia na naukite: Geografski institut, *Atlas Narodna Republika Bulgaria* (Sofia: Glavno upravlenie po geodeziia i kartografiia pri ministerstvoto na akrhitektura i blagoustroistvoto, 1973), 7.

Military needs during the war not only furthered centralization but also created links between Pirin and the occupied territories. The region's location on the pre-1941 border served to make it the initial site for POW camps.⁴⁷ Later in the war, sporadic Allied bombing attacks against the rail lines brought the war directly to Pirin. The chief local consequence of the later war years, however, was to require an again weakening state to redefine its relations with the

⁴⁶ Beljanovski, 196.

⁴⁷ TsDA, fond 396, op. 1, a.e. 37, l 4. Proximity to Vardar and Aegean Macedonia meant that Pirin was also used as a staging point for the transfer of Macedonian Jews to Nazi Germany in the Holocaust; a temporary camp was located at Gorna Dzhumaiia. See also Stojchev, 211.

provinces. On September 28, 1943, Protocol 136 of the Council of Ministers recreated a Pirin district in the form of the Gorna Dzhumaia *oblast* (see Figure 18 for the new administrative borders).

Significantly, powers over local administration were devolved to the district. Its district administration now supervised local mayors directly, and directed local functions such as social welfare. The central government did, however, keep direct control over local police. However, in return the district was also required to administer the military rationing (*Izdruzhka po voenni prichini*) and undertake requisitions at the behest of the central government.⁴⁸ Decentralization became a late wartime necessity for a state increasingly weakened by the decline in German fortunes. This weakness, in turn, invited the renewed rise of autonomist groups.

VMRO and the War

The Bulgarian occupation of Vardar and Aegean Macedonia reinvigorated the flagging Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Though the government had considered VMRO to be a rival in Pirin, the group was also initially an ally in attracting support in the occupied regions in Macedonia and Thrace. Accordingly, members of the Organization were allowed by the government to establish chapters in the occupied territories beginning in 1941.⁴⁹ It was moderately successful in doing so, although the total number of members

⁴⁸ ODA F61K, “Oblasten inspektorat Gorna Dzhumaia, 8.10.1943-9.9.1944,” 1-3; on oversight of mayors, a.e. 14, 15, 16, 21.

⁴⁹ Petrov, *Makedonija: Istorija i politicheska sudba*, III, 10.

recruited remained in the thousands.⁵⁰ In part, this reflected continuing rivalries between factions of VMRO, but more important was the status of the territory which was instead provided an “over-centralized” administrative regime controlled directly by the ministries.⁵¹ VMRO members cooperating within the government’s administration of these territories were permissible, but neither local nor “Bulgarian” autonomous groups were tolerated in occupied Macedonia by the government.

As the war progressed, however, such groups discovered they might well win support elsewhere among the Axis powers. In 1941 Ante Pavelić, *poglavnik* of the Independent State of Croatia, had already approached Ivan Mihailov in the latter’s exile in Fascist Italy to inquire if he could recruit Macedonians for Croatian military units.⁵² These initial discussions came to nothing, but by 1943 the Axis raised paramilitary units from local populations in the Balkans, including in the Macedonian lands. First the Italians, then the Germans cooperated with VMRO in organizing the units, chiefly in Aegean Macedonia.⁵³ Mihailov himself received permission to raise two or three battalions under the operational command of the SS. Other local independent Macedonian “security” units were formed, nominally to ensure local order and the defense of villages or regions

⁵⁰ TsDA, fond 396, opis 1, a.e. 1, l. 1-3, 10, 15, 19, 28-31. See also Petrov, 48-55.

⁵¹ Crampton, 123. The administrative programs of the occupation are summarized in Petrov, 34-36.

⁵² Stojchev, 111.

⁵³ Nick Trovsky, *Macedonia’s Secret Army: VMRO Militias of Southwestern Macedonia, 1943-1944.* (Bayside: Axis Europa Books, 2002), 5, 36.

against Communist Partisans. They also served to free up scarce German troops for other duties, and limit the area of operations for Partisans.⁵⁴

The Bulgarian government agreed to German mobilization of VMRO units only reluctantly given its already limited manpower and declining authority in the occupied regions.⁵⁵ This reluctance makes further sense when we consider that Mihailov agitated locally for and attempted to negotiate with the Germans an agreement to create an independent Macedonian state.⁵⁶

The Wartime Communist Struggle over Macedonia

Just as wartime needs helped to reinvigorate VMRO in Macedonia, these same demands helped to reinvigorate the local Communist movement. As the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union recast the war as a struggle between Fascism and Communism, the Bulgarian Communist Party enjoyed renewed prestige among opponents to Boris' dictatorship in Bulgaria and in Bulgarian-occupied zones of Macedonia. Local Party organizations in Aegean, Pirin and Vardar Macedonia began to raise guerilla units following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. This led in 1941 to early confrontations between the

⁵⁴ Trotsky, 77. See also John Koliopoulos' treatment of the role of collaboration by Macedonians with Bulgarian occupation officials in John Koliopoulos, *Plundered Loyalties: Axis occupation and civil strife in Greek West Macedonia, 1941-1949* (New York: NYU Press, 1999), 57-71, 133-156.

⁵⁵ Trotsky, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Mihailov states such an independent program in his memoirs. It is unclear, however, if he hoped to create an independent Macedonian state in Aegean and Vardar Macedonia, or if he hoped to secure control over the geographic region as he had in Pirin. See Ivan Mihailov, *Spomeni IV: Osvoboditelna borba, 1924-1934 g. (produlzhenie)* (Indianapolis: Western Newspaper Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), 948-964.

Bulgarian and Yugoslav party organizations. Both parties agreed on the need to create and lead a powerful Communist organization within Macedonia, but disagreed on who would control it.⁵⁷

Under the new leadership of Josip Broz Tito, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) authorized the creation of an ambiguously subordinate Communist Party of Macedonia (KPM) in 1937. The question that emerged in the first year of the war was whether this organization, in territory now controlled by the Bulgarian government, should fall under the control of the Bulgarian Worker's Party. The internal composition of the KPM complicated the issue, since its 300 members and 400 affiliates in the youth movement were divided between a "Bulgarophile" branch led by Metodija Shatorov Sharlo and a "Titoist" branch led by Lazar Kolishevski. Sharlo, as leader of the KPM, officially switched the party's allegiance from the KPJ to the BRP in the summer of 1941, setting off a local struggle for power.⁵⁸ Kolishevski, however, was arrested and imprisoned by Bulgarian authorities, leaving the regional organization outside of Tito's effective control. The Yugoslav and Bulgarian Parties clashed on the issue of authority over the KPM over the next two years, ultimately appealing to the

⁵⁷ Initially the Communist bands in Greek Macedonia were raised from the local ethnic Greek population, delaying conflict between the Greek parties and its neighbors. On the Greek resistance, see Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation 1941-1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); specifically on the emergence of EAM/ELAS in Macedonia, 86.

⁵⁸ Kostadin Paleshutski, *Yugoslavskata komunisticheska partiiia i makedonskiat vupros, 1919-1945* (Sofia: Bulgarska akademiiia na naukite, 1985), 287-301. Differences had emerged between Sharlo and Tito in 1940, principally that Sharlo was too nationalist and that he was reluctant to follow instructions from the Central Committee. Although the KPM had been organized as a distinct party, Tito's view was that it remained part of a network of "local" parties within the framework of the KPJ.

Comintern (and through it, Joseph Stalin) to make a decision. Even with Stalin's order in 1941 that the Macedonian Party should revert to the KPJ, local resistance forced Tito to dispatch Svetozar Vumanović-Tempo, one of his inner circle, to reassert central control. Only in 1943 did Tempo finally eliminate Sharlo's faction from the local party, with Sharlo assassinated in 1944.

Decisive in Tempo's ability to seize control over the movement was the relative weakness of the BRP during the Second World War. Bulgarian Communists found few Bulgarians interested in waging a partisan war "at home." Although the Bulgarian government's wartime policies caused economic privation, the country did not suffer from a foreign occupation as did Greece and Yugoslavia. The eastern districts of Pirin (the stronghold of past VMRO activity, as noted in Chapter Two) were thus unusual in seeing the creation of a partisan detachment in July 1941, in Razlog.⁵⁹ While the KPJ seized control of local resistance groups and conducted a major partisan campaign in Montenegro, Bosnia and Serbia over 1941-1943, Bulgarian partisan strength even by early 1944 remained limited to just over 2300 members. Only 60 percent of them were party members or affiliates.⁶⁰

Pirin contributed a meager 100 members to this strength, although by September 1944 as the Red Army entered Bulgaria additional units were being raised.⁶¹ The offer by the Bulgarian Communists to create a "special zone" in

⁵⁹ Beljanovski, 26.

⁶⁰ Georgi Dimitrov, letter of March 12, 1944, in Banac, *Dimitrov*, 309-310

⁶¹ The official history of the Pirin BKP organization emphasizes a strong partisan movement from 1941; however, post-1989 historiography has challenged this claim. See BKP, *Istoriia na BKP*, 281-282; Vasil Giozelev, et. al., ed.,

Pirin and along the border with Yugoslavia to facilitate cooperation between the two counties' partisan groups was arguably an attempt to secure Bulgarian participation in a successful Yugoslav partisan struggle. In Vardar Macedonia by early 1944, Tempo had raised a somewhat more substantial force of over a thousand, but still small compared to the KPJ's strength in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia.⁶² The reason for his success lay in the KPJ's recasting of the Macedonian question, the wartime creation of the People's Republic of Macedonia. The inhabitants of Vardar (and, to some extent, Aegean and Pirin) Macedonia were now promised an equal state within a postwar Communist Yugoslav or Balkan Federation.

Over the course of 1943-1944, the KPJ pressed the BRP over claims to Pirin Macedonia, "capitalizing on Bulgaria's weak diplomatic position and the internal weakness of the Bulgarian party."⁶³ However, both governments still lacked firm control over their respective Macedonian territories and hoped that the issue might be resolved later as part of a possible plan for a Balkan Federation. As a result, the BRP accepted the future "unification of Macedonia"

Makedonskiiat vupros v bulgaro-yugoslavskite otnosheniiia (1944-1952) (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 2004), 15. The figures for local and national partisan activities should be considered with some caution as well. The figures of 100 partisans in Pirin and 2300 nationwide are suspiciously similar to the ratio of Pirin's population compared to that of Bulgaria as a whole.

⁶² Stojchev provides figures for Macedonian partisan strength as "1200 active partisans," 48 "in jail" and 700 "in concentration camps; even if such numbers were exaggerated by the wartime movement, such a force compares well to the *total* number of partisans throughout Bulgaria. Stojchev, 260-265.

⁶³ Kofos, 138.

in principle and agreed to join in planning for a future transfer. But any change in territorial borders was postponed.⁶⁴

This agreement suited the Yugoslav Party, allowing it to strengthen its own position on Macedonia. The KPJ's growing confidence during the Second World War was the result of its Partisan struggle expanding long before the Red Army arrived and then moving on to Hungary in Fall 1944. Tito seized upon this as evidence that Yugoslavia had liberated itself from German rule and had taken power through its own efforts. The size and success of the Partisans arguably encouraged the KPJ's advocacy of an enlarged Macedonia it could incorporate. Initially, however, the reality of the KPJ's limited power on the ground in Vardar Macedonia made advocating unification with Pirin and Aegean Macedonia the best way of gaining wider support in the region.

Communist Redefinitions: The People's Republic of Macedonia

Macedonian Communist Party membership in Yugoslav Macedonia had been tiny at the beginning of the Second World War (less than 500 members in late 1943). Riven by the factional disputes noted above, partisan activity began in earnest only in 1943, lagging behind other regions of Yugoslavia.⁶⁵ The ability of the KPJ to consolidate its power rapidly in post-war Vardar Macedonia was directly due to the party's willingness to create a broader autonomous state within a Yugoslav federal structure: the People's Republic of Macedonia

⁶⁴ Beljanovska, 96-99

⁶⁵ Palmer, 135; Barker, 80; Kofos, 121. Partisan activity by Macedonians similarly lagged in Greece, also beginning in 1943; See Koliopoulos, 61-72.

(*Narodna Republika Makedonija*, or NRM).⁶⁶ Scholars such as Evangelos Kofos have argued that Tito envisioned the Republic of Macedonia primarily as a vehicle by which Yugoslavia could attempt to annex Aegean and Pirin Macedonia.⁶⁷ Arguably such motives were a consideration for the Central Committee of the KPJ, but the new state was a means by which Belgrade could obtain mass support in Vardar given its historic weakness in the area. Despite the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia's enhanced international reputation after the Partisan war of 1941-1945, Belgrade was forced to negotiate its position at the local level, offering recognition of a Macedonian national consciousness in exchange for the province's acceptance of the new Communist regime.⁶⁸

In November 1942, the Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (*Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Oslobodenja Jugoslavije*, or AVNOJ) assembly met to establish the political platform of the Communist-led resistance

⁶⁶ Troebst, "Yugoslav Macedonia," 244. On the KPJ's promise for an independent state, Mihajlo Apostolski, "The Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia and the Macedonian National Question," in *From the Past of the Macedonian People* (Skopje: Skopje Radio and Television, 1969).

⁶⁷ Kofos advances the view that the NRM was a "pivot" around which expansion could take place. Kofos, 136. Here, Kofos argues that the KPJ was powerful enough to both force an "artificial" national consciousness upon the inhabitants of Vardar Macedonia, and use this issue as part of its attempt to forge a Yugoslav-dominated Balkan Federation.

⁶⁸ Similar negotiations would be required in Kosovo, where the Anti-Fascist National Liberation Council of Kosovo-Metohija issued the "Bujan Resolution" on January 10, 1944, calling for "self-determination" of Kosovo's Albanian population and union with Albania. The Yugoslav leadership would initially compromise with suggestions that some sort of autonomy could be arranged. Following the Tito-Stalin split in 1948 and Albania's support for the Soviet position, Kosovo was essentially placed under the control of the State Security Directorate (Uprava državne bezbednosti). See Viktor Meier, *Yugoslavia: A History of its Demise* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 26-27; Ivo Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito: Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 211.

in Yugoslavia. One of the points announced was the planned recognition of a separate Macedonian republic.⁶⁹ If initially the Yugoslav People's Republic of Macedonia was envisioned as a vehicle by which Yugoslavia could attempt to annex Aegean and Pirin Macedonia, it rapidly grew into a reliable pillar of the new Communist Yugoslavia.

Details of the new republic were clarified at the Anti-Fascist Assembly of the National Liberation of Macedonia (*Antifashistiko sobranie na narodnoto oslobođuvane na Makedonija*, or ASNOM) held on the forty-first anniversary of the Ilinden Uprising: August 2, 1944. The assembly not only echoed the 1924 Comintern platform for an independent Macedonia and the promises for federalism of the earlier national Anti-Fascist Liberation Movement for Yugoslavia assemblies, it placed them within the context of a new Macedonian history.⁷⁰ The Partisan struggle was the “Second Ilinden” against foreign oppression, and the new state the culmination of decades of revolutionary struggle against foreign imperialism (particularly “greater-Bulgarian chauvinism”). The assembly proposed a series of “Macedonianization” measures without addressing the nature of any new state or its relation to a future, federal

⁶⁹ Troebst, “Yugoslav Macedonia,” 244. On the KPJ’s promise for an independent state, Mihajlo Apostolski, “The Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia and the Macedonian National Question,” in *From the Past of the Macedonian People* (Skopje: Skopje Radio and Television, 1969).

⁷⁰ Particularly the historical context; see Mihajlo Apostolski, “The First Session of the Antifascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia,” in *From the Past of the Macedonian People* (Skopje: Skopje Radio and Television, 1969), 285-286.

Yugoslavia.⁷¹ The “cultural front” was instead awarded the central position in the KPM’s consolidation of power; it provided a vehicle for acceptance of the NRM by providing it with an ethnic affiliation.⁷²

Vardar Macedonia was, for the first time, to be a government “for” its inhabitants — and to be administered by them. Broad autonomy would be granted so long as the party apparatus and state apparatus in the NRM supported the policies of the Central Committee in Belgrade. The Macedonian Communists used this autonomy to undertake a “cultural program” to codify and promulgate a definitive Macedonian national consciousness. This would be an inspiration for the BKP’s later cultural politics in Pirin, as detailed in Chapter Seven. Central to the reforms in Yugoslavia was the codification of a Macedonian literary language, to be developed by the Commission for Language and Orthography with extensive political input from the KPM.⁷³ *Nova Makedonija*, a weekly (later, daily) newspaper was launched on October 29, 1944 with the motto, “Death to Fascism — Freedom for the People.” This standard Partisan slogan was arguably intended here to endorse a nationalistic ethos as well as revolutionary enthusiasm, since “narod” carries the connotation of both “nation” and “people.”⁷⁴ Circulation of the paper remained low, in part due to low adult literacy, but steadily rose into the late 1940s. Literacy rates were a particular problem in Vardar and Aegean Macedonia since Slav Macedonians had

⁷¹ Note Institute of National History, *History*, 369-372 for a description of the ASNOM platform.

⁷² Palmer, 153.

⁷³ Stojan Riteski, *Sozdavanjeto na sovremeniot makedonski literaturni jazik* (Skopje, Studentski zbor, 1988). See also Tsurnushanov, 275-282.

⁷⁴ *Nova Makedonija*, October 29, 1944, page 1.

sometimes been excluded from the educational systems of the interwar period or, more often, their parents had refused to allow them to attend “Greek” or “Serb” schools. The cultural campaign addressed this problem with an adult literacy campaign and also through other cultural venues: the opening of a Macedonian National Theater company in Skopje in April 3, 1945, the 1946 opening of “Radio Skopje” and the showing of the first films subtitled or dubbed in Macedonian in that year.⁷⁵

The local party organization’s successes in sponsoring cultural activities were offset by lingering conflicts between Skopje and Belgrade. As the KPM steadily grew in membership, expanding from 300 in 1941 to over 6,000 by the beginning of 1946, it began to flirt with asserting independent statehood. As with the earlier dispute between Tito and Shatarov in 1943, conflicts emerged over “Macedonian separatism.” By late 1944, the first president of ASNOM, Metodi Andonov (“Chento”) was criticizing the KPJ’s policies on several accounts. He not only argued for more autonomy in key cultural areas, including the orthography of the new language, but also a separate media. He sought the creation of a Macedonian Telegraph Agency separate from TANJUG (the Telegraph Agency of New Yugoslavia, or *Telegrafska Agentsija Nove Jugoslavije*), which functioned as the Partisans’ news service.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Troebst, *ibid*, 253-254.

⁷⁶ Such disputes also emerged in Croatia between the local leadership under Andrija Hebrang and the federal Central Committee under Tito. Hebrang sought not only a Croatian telegraph agency but also broad economic autonomy for Croatia. See Lampe, *Yugoslavia*, 224, 242; Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito*, 91, 120; Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 182

Chento went even further in seeking control over the Macedonian partisan brigades, arguing that they should be used to seize control over Macedonian-inhabited areas in Aegean Macedonia instead of against the retreating German army. He argued for a drive south to liberate Thessaloniki, rather than north to liberate the Srem just west of Belgrade or Slovenia. When Tito insisted on the later, he attempted to organize his own military campaign using local partisan detachments. A number of prominent Macedonian Communists followed his line. “Separatist” sentiment was significant enough that the “Gotse Delchev” brigade rioted in November-December 1944 when ordered north to Srem. Non-Macedonian units were brought into Skopje to suppress the rioters.⁷⁷

Collaborators with Bulgarian occupation forces in Vardar Macedonia raised another problem, since many of them had contacts with the interwar VMRO. The first trials began in May 1945, but local “pro-Bulgarian” groups or conspiracies were discovered over the next two years throughout the NRM.⁷⁸ The Central Committee of the KPM used its broad autonomy over local police to eliminate the remaining pro-Bulgarian organizations and circles in the country through a purge of the Party and hundreds of arrests.⁷⁹

By the end of 1946, however, Tito and Macedonian Communists loyal to him had largely overcome these problems. Chento was eased out of power from

⁷⁷ Troebst, 248-249, 251.

⁷⁸ Troebst, *ibid*, 256-257.

⁷⁹ The Bulgarian scholar Kosta Tsurushanov argues that the cultural campaign was “Serbianization.” However, this does not explain the campaign’s general success, given past resistance to such measures. See Kosta Tsurushanov, *Makedonizmut i suprotivata na Makedonija sreshtu nego* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo Sv. Kliment Ohridski, 1992), 283-334, 361-378.

1944-1946. In January 1945 much of his authority as President of ASNOM was transferred to his deputy, Lazar Kolishevski, who had proven his loyal to Tito during the earlier infighting with Shatarov. In March 1946, the Central Committee of the KPJ removed Chento from office. In his subsequent trial he was sentenced to eleven years of hard labor. Kolishevski now sent many of the “separatist” political faction to posts elsewhere in the reconstituted Yugoslavia, outside of Vardar.⁸⁰ The continued expansion of the KPM (doubling to 11,570 members by the end of 1946⁸¹) further diluted the influence of Chento’s group. With the leadership of the People’s Republic of Macedonia now willing supporters of the Tito’s Yugoslavia and with the state-defined Macedonian national consciousness popularly received in much of the country, the KPM now turned to the question of unifying Macedonia.

On this issue the Central Committee of the KPJ supported the NRM in negotiations with the Greek Communist Party (*Kommunistiko Komma Elladas*, or KKE) and Bulgarian Worker’s Party to unify Aegean and Pirin Macedonian. An agreement had already been forged between the KPJ and BRP for collaborative work in the future, and for a settlement of the Macedonian question.⁸² On September 20, 1944 the BKP and Macedonian Communist Party had opened

⁸⁰ On Chento’s fall from power, see Fidanka Tanashkova, *Metodija Andonov Chento* (Skopje: NIP Nova Makedonija, 1990). The “internal exile” of Chento’s supporters included Kiro Gligorov, the first president of the post-1991 Republic of Macedonia, who began a lengthy career in KPJ positions outside of the Republic of Macedonia.

⁸¹ Troebst, 251.

⁸² Veselin Dimitrov, “Revolution Released: Stalin, the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Establishment of the Cominform,” in Francesca Gori and Silvio Ponds, eds., *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-53* (London: Macmillan, 1996); also R. Craig Nation, “A Balkan Union?” in Gori and Ponds.

negotiations in Sofia.⁸³ The MKP began radio broadcasts into Bulgaria encouraging “the Macedonians in the Bulgarian part of Macedonia” to form local committees, partisan units and to anticipate their role within a future federal state.⁸⁴ Tito had taken the initiative in a period of late wartime strength to assist in the definition of a Macedonian national consciousness centered in Vardar Macedonia. Now, the new Communist regime in Bulgaria would deal with the same questions from its period of late-war and postwar weakness.

The Fatherland Front Coup of 1944

As early as December 1941, Bulgarian Communists had sought to bring together a popular front against the government.⁸⁵ Effective measures by the political police against Communist party members, the arrest of its agents smuggled in from the Soviet Union and the potential for German victory limited the appeal of such a strategy. Not until the clear reversal of German military fortunes in Africa and on the Eastern Front in late 1942 did others among the still underground political parties respond. In August 1943 the Communists (who officially remained under the title of Bulgarian Workers’ Party, or BRP), the left wing of the Agrarian Party, the Social Democrats and Zveno joined in the Fatherland Front (*Otechestven front*, or OF), led by the former Zveno Prime Minister Kimon Stoianov. The death of Tsar Boris just two weeks later on August 28, 1943 created a political vacuum. It was filled only partially by the

⁸³ Jotevski, 64.

⁸⁴ TsDA, fond 1b, op 7, a.e. 215, I 1-4.

⁸⁵ Bell, 66. However, a fourth Communist was included as a minister without portfolio, as was a member of the Pladne Agrarians.

establishment of a tripartite regency consisting of Prince Kiril (Boris' brother), former Prime Minister Bogdan Filov (who resigned to accept the regency) and Minister of War General Nikola Mihov, who presided over a series of short-lived puppet prime ministers over 1943-1944.

By 1944, with the Germans clearly in retreat and American bombing raids against Sofia in full swing, public opinion had begun to shift. The Fatherland Front began to draw significant support for its opposition to both the royal dictatorship (now run by the regents) and to Nazi Germany. In early August the Bulgarian government had already begun attempts to emphasize Bulgarian neutrality in the war between Germany and the Soviet Union. A *coup d'état* in Bucharest on August 23 signaled the collapse of the German's front in Romania and triggered an immediate political crisis in Sofia. The government of Ivan Bagrianov, the most recent of the weak prime ministers of the royal dictatorship, now resigned in favor of the right-wing Agrarian leader Kostantin Muraviev.⁸⁶ Despite Muraviev's last-minute attempts to come to terms with Moscow, the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria on September 5.⁸⁷ This declaration, and the subsequent Soviet invasion prompted the Fatherland Front to act, and on September 9 it seized power in a bloodless *coup* led by supporters of *Zveno*.⁸⁸

While the Front was a Communist-inspired organization, it was not yet Communist-dominated. The cabinet announced on September 9 numbered only

⁸⁶ Statelova, 630.

⁸⁷ Part of Muraviev's attempts to come to terms with the Soviets included Bulgaria's declaration of war on Nazi Germany — on September 8, three days after the Soviets declared war on Bulgaria.

⁸⁸ Kalinova, 38-41.

three Communist-held ministries, but these included the Ministries of Internal Affairs and National Health and Justice.⁸⁹ From this base, the BRP's strategy was to consolidate power and expand the party to the point that its coalition partners could be dispensed with. Serving this goal was the rapid growth in membership. By January 1945, the BRP reaching a quarter of a million party members. While retaining the multi-party Fatherland Front at the national level, the Communists moved to quickly secure control at the local level. By the beginning of 1945, over three-quarters of the cities and villagers had Communist mayors.⁹⁰ Local police by this point had also come under the party's control. The old force had been disbanded on September 10, 1944, and in succeeding months a new People's Militia (*Narodna militsiya*) was recruited from party members.⁹¹ Outside of Sofia and other major cities, this militia usually remained under the control of the local party apparatus, but the Central Committee in Sofia retained control over the gendarmerie. These police forces would be used in domestic purges that killed 7,000 in 1944 alone. With the passage of the Law for the Protection of National Power (*Zakon za zashtita na narodnata vlast*) on March 7, 1945, police repression at both the local and national levels would become more systematic.⁹² Although Bulgarian historiography definitely dates Communist control in Bulgaria from Sept 9, 1944, it seems more accurate to say that this was the beginning of an increasing and unrelenting growth of

⁸⁹ Bell, 76.

⁹⁰ P. Ostoich, *BKP i izgrazhdaneto na narodnodemokraticeskata durzhava, 9 Septemvri 1944-Dekemvri 1947* (Sofia, Izdatelstvo na BKP, 1967), 77.

⁹¹ TsDA, Fond 1b, opis 5, a.e. 2, l. 241.

⁹² Liubomir Ognianov, *Durzhavno-politicheskata sistema na Bulgaria, 1944-1948* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata akademiiia na naukite, 1993), 50.

Communist influence throughout the country that would, by the late 1940s, merge almost seamlessly with the onset of Bulgaria's own version a Stalinist regime.

Any Communist seizure of complete power required first the conclusion of the Second World War, in which the Bulgarian army now fought alongside the Soviet Red Army against Nazi Germany. An Allied Control Committee (ACC) composed of American, British and Soviet representatives officially administered Bulgaria. The BRP accordingly planned to wait until international recognition was obtained for the Front government and the ACC was disbanded before taking complete control. There was little immediate attempt to eliminate outright non-Communist allies throughout 1944 and 1945. Rather, the Communists sought to secure power-bases within the ministry of the interior and in local administration, removing civil servants from opposition parties and replacing them with reliable party cadres.⁹³ Not until March 1946 did the Party begin to exclude non-Communists systematically from the government. By this point the Party had secured both sufficient popular support and control over the administrative apparatus (including electoral apparatus) to ensure its victory in the parliamentary elections held later that year on October 27.⁹⁴ In the interim, the

⁹³ Vesselin Dimitrov, "Revolution Released: Stalin, the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Establishment of the Cominform," in Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons, eds., *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-1953* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 276.

⁹⁴ Kostadinova, 97. The Fatherland Front took 70.1% of the vote; this included 53.1 percent for the BRP. The "Opposition Bloc" of Agrarians, Social Democrats and independents polled 28 percent; this is impressive given the degree of control the BRP had over the elections, but still shows clear Communist dominance.

Central Committee of the BRP was forced to wait until it could seize complete control. This not only preserved a dwindling autonomy for rival political parties within Bulgaria, but allowed local Communist organizations to remain outside of the control of the Central Party. Communists in Pirin would, as local elites before them, use this opportunity to undertake their own autonomous initiatives in Pirin.

The Fatherland Front in Pirin: Decentralizing Power

The BRP in 1944 quickly moved to take control over the formal channels of administrative power it inherited from the wartime government. At the same time, however, the rapid expansion of the party and the creation of thousands of local “Fatherland Front” councils served to decentralize power.⁹⁵ Party membership in Pirin went from 7,308 at the end of 1944 to 13,639 at the beginning of 1946, with a majority of the new enrollees being peasants.⁹⁶ In Pirin as in other districts, a Regional Fatherland Front Committee was established following the coup of September 9.⁹⁷ Such regional committees enjoyed control over the local mechanisms of repression. In Pirin, the first labor and interrogation camps (*trudovozpitatelni lagari*) were set up in December 1944, housing both political prisoners and social undesirables. The first camp was opened in Sv.

⁹⁵ Bell, 82-83.

⁹⁶ Veselin Hadzhinikolov, et. al., *Istoriia na Blagoevgradskata okruzhna organizatsia na BKP*, 335. The Nevrokop and Sv. Vrach *okolii* were over-represented in these figures, possibly because both areas were rural and possibly offered a larger number of acceptable peasant recruits.

⁹⁷ ODAB, *Spomeni na Stoine Lisiiski* I. 3, 5.

Vrach, housing nearly 800 political prisoners (chiefly ex-policemen, officers and local administrators) who were put to hard labor repairing local railways.⁹⁸

For Pirin, the role of the Regional Fatherland Front Committee was complicated by the question of its relation to the new, neighboring Yugoslav People's Republic of Macedonia. For the BRP to make a concrete decision on this question of Macedonian identity would be to create a precedent for the cession of the province to Yugoslavia (see Chapter Seven). It was, instead, the local party that was allowed to forge ahead in the issue. The provincial Front Committee's interest in the topic can be seen in the local resolutions of the First [Gorna Dzhumaia] Conference of the BRP of October 22-23, 1944. Several key articles established the Party organization's post-war position on Macedonia:

The Gorna Dzhumaia Region, which consists of the Gorna Dzhumaia, Razlog, Nevrokop, Sveti Vrach and Petrich Districts, is geographically, economically and ethnographically an inseparable part of Macedonia.⁹⁹

The resolution continued by stressing both the possibility of a future Balkan Federation incorporating Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and the "conjoining of the Gorna Dzhumaia region to the Macedonian state."¹⁰⁰ Negotiations had already raised such a possibility and (as we shall see in Chapter Seven) the status of

⁹⁸ Ognianov, 47-49. The official pronouncement of the camps noted that in addition to political prisoners they would house "prostitutes and pimps, gamblers, extortionists and beggars."

⁹⁹ Pero Korobar and Orde Ivanoski, eds., *The Historical Truth: The Progressive Social Circles in Bulgaria and Pirin Macedonia on the Macedonian National Question: Documents, Studies, resolutions, Appeals and Published Articles, 1896-1956.* (Skopje: Kultura, 1983), 126

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 127.

such a bilateral or multilateral arrangement would prove critical for Pirin.¹⁰¹ In the immediate future, however,

As long as the Gorna Dzhumaia region administratively belongs to Bulgaria, the Regional Committee of the Party will maintain organizational links and will receive directives from the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Workers' Party... but will have autonomous rights to all the questions that concern the Macedonian issues.

The Regional Committee will maintain close relations with the Communist Party of Macedonia for coordinated activity in connection with all questions that concern the unification and construction of the Macedonian state and for the preparations for the conjoining of the Regional Party Organization to the Communist Party of Macedonia.¹⁰²

This proclamation effectively reserved broad rights of autonomy for the local party. This was all the more important because opposition to the accords between the CPY and BRP had not only emerged among émigré organizations in Bulgaria¹⁰³ but also criticism of the national Party's policies on Macedonia *within* the district Fatherland Front committee.¹⁰⁴

Key functions were still reserved for the central government, the most important being that of the reconstituted Communist-controlled gendarmerie. Elements of VMRO remained in Pirin, some of them quite actively hostile to the BRP. The Party was able to crack down on VMRO's upper hierarchy effectively, and considered it to be no threat to the new regime in Sofia.¹⁰⁵ But in rural areas

¹⁰¹ R Craig Nation, "A Balkan Union? Southeastern Europe in Soviet Security Policy, 1944-8," 128; also G. Daskalov, "Problemata za federatsiata v bulgaro-iugoslavskite otnosheniia (noemvri 1944 – april 1945), *Izvestiia na instituta po istoriia na BKP* 62 (1988), 5-53.

¹⁰² Ibid, 126-128.

¹⁰³ Angelov, 24-25.

¹⁰⁴ ODAB, f 1b, op 1, a.e. 4, I 58, 64-67, 134-135.

¹⁰⁵ For an excellent overview of the BRP's approach to VMRO, see Ivanka Nedeva and Naum Kaytchev, "VMRO groupings in Bulgaria after the Second

of Pirin, isolated *cheti* could be effective. In two separate actions in June 1946, for instance, a VMRO *cheta* killed two Communists in Sv. Vrach, and ambushed 14 more on the road between Sv. Vrach and Sofia. The immediate response was a police crackdown that arrested VMRO activists, and the assassination of a local figure thought to be a potential leader of VMRO bands.¹⁰⁶ The regional Front Committee still noted in its annual report in 1946 that “Mihailovism” remained a significant local force limiting “the consolidation of the new people’s authority.”¹⁰⁷

Beyond this, however, the newly created Regional Fatherland Front Committees were actually more radical in advancing both total Communist control and “social justice” in the period of consolidation than the national party. Radicalism was the norm for most of the local committees in Bulgaria, who sought to carry out their own local revolutionary programs in politics, society and the economy.¹⁰⁸ The government in Sofia was forced to specifically remind local committees in Pirin in 1946 that non-Communist but legal organizations could participate in local Fatherland Front committees.¹⁰⁹ What also set Pirin apart was the continuing question of identity in the region.

World War” in James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States, 1946. Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union: Volume VI* (Washington D.C.: US Department of State, 1969) 104-106.

¹⁰⁷ ODAB F108, opis 1, a.e., 3, l. 11; 8.

¹⁰⁸ Dimitrov, *ibid.* 277-278.

¹⁰⁹ F 108, opis 1, a.e. 1, l. 64.

Decentralizing Identity in Pirin After 1944

The domestic struggle to solidify Communist power allowed for decentralization of the local organs of the Fatherland Front. So, too, the BRP's "international struggle" to establish its place in the hierarchy of the Cominform meant the decentralization of national consciousness in Pirin. By October 1944 the party had openly exhorted Macedonians "to struggle" in order to gain independence.¹¹⁰ True, the party's recognition was often couched in broader terms reflecting the larger wartime struggle against fascism. Georgi Dimitrov¹¹¹, the dominant figure within the BRP's Central Committee, followed this lead in a speech to the *Subranie* in 1945:

The struggle of the Macedonian people for freedom was the anvil on which the Macedonian nationality was forged and the Macedonian state built. The decisive movement in that struggle was the fact that the liberation struggle of the Macedonian people was integrated with the struggle of the Balkan peoples under the leadership of the progressive forces against the German occupiers and against fascism and their Balkan lackeys.¹¹²

As directed by the BRP, the regional committee began to undertake direct, bilateral negotiations with officials in the People's Republic of Macedonia in Yugoslavia. Although these contacts, and the agreements that sprang from them, were reported to the BRP, the *initiative* to make such contacts devolved to the local level. The local committee shaped and reinterpreted such issues along

¹¹⁰ Todor Pavlov, *Rabotnichesko Delo*, October 21, 1944.

¹¹¹ Dimitrov himself was of Macedonian origin; although born in Kovachevtsi in Bulgaria, outside of geographic Macedonia, his parents had emigrated from Pirin.

¹¹² Georgi Dimitrov, speech on December 25, 1945 to the National Assembly, in *Georgi Dimitrov: Govori, statii I izjavi* (Kultura: Skopje, 1947), 18.

traditional lines, drawing direct reference to Pirin's revolutionary past under VMRO through to the contemporary conflict.

In our Pirin region the FF as a people's democratic movement becomes a natural successor to the deeds of the true Macedonian liberation movement activists such as Gotse Delchev and Yane Sandanski.¹¹³

Pirinkso Delo, the Communist newspaper founded in the area in 1945, became the central forum for the Regional Fatherland Front Committee's distribution of the new, acceptable versions of history. Much like *Pirinski Glas*, it sought to mix loyalty to the efforts of the new regime, articles on Bulgarian events with a commentary that related both to the history of the Macedonian movement. At the same time, as a local organ *Pirinkso Delo* also focused to some extent on the district itself apart from the policies of the BRP and MKP.

This was not, however, to last. By the fall of 1946 the BRP had clarified its position: a Macedonian nation existed, but only as the People's Republic of Macedonia within the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The reunification of this nation would be done by the auspices of Yugoslavia's PRM, and the Pirin Regional Fatherland Front Committee would be required to collaborate in this project of nation-reunification.¹¹⁴

Pirinkso Delo publicly verified this. In the December 30, 1946 issue it carried an announcement to "district leaders, village mayors and census personnel" that:

Since the population of the Gorna Dzhumaiia region is primarily of Macedonian origin, you should explain to this population that they have the absolute freedom of declaring their nationality and origin openly and

¹¹³ ODAB F 108, opis 1, a.e., 3, 12.

¹¹⁴ "August 9, 1946," *Rezoliutsiia na X Plenum na TsK BRP(k)*.

without any coercion, just as they feel in their own hearts and souls as faithful children of their homeland.¹¹⁵

With the firm establishment of Communist rule in Bulgaria, the BRP was now willing to take steps to direct the course of state administration in Pirin. But to do this, it was forced to accede to a Yugoslav-sponsored, rival national consciousness — a Macedonian consciousness attractive and appealing to the inhabitants of Pirin.

Centralization Advancing and Retreating

The period 1934-1946 reflects a growing sense of etatism among Bulgaria's political leadership. But both late in the wartime regime and initially under the Communists, Pirin was a problem. The district had not only "escaped" control of the central government, it had done so in an open and frequently confrontational fashion. Successive regimes had realized the need to "intervene" in Pirin — but only the authoritarian regimes ushered in by the 1934 *Zveno coup* were successful in doing so. They were successful less due to ideological persuasion than to their relative willingness to embrace state intervention. Despite the celebrated *caesura* of September 9, 1944, both the strengths and weaknesses of Communist and non-Communist authoritarian regimes are remarkably similar. In both cases, the state sought to expand its administrative apparatus in the region and extend central control, but periods of state weakness

¹¹⁵ Boris Volev, "Announcement #3628," *Pirinsko Delo*, 51:2, December 30, 1946, 1.

(1941-1944, and then 1944-45) forced the state to cede some power and autonomy back to the district.

In this context, then, as the Bulgarian Workers' Party consolidated its hold on power within Bulgaria over the course of 1946 and strengthened the potential power of the central government, the BRP's ability to intervene in local affairs increased. But at the same time, Bulgarian Communists faced a dilemma. Wartime negotiation had established a "deliberate uncertainty" over the future of Macedonia, allowing both groups to assume they would unify Macedonia in the future. As Chapter Seven demonstrates, a stronger Yugoslav Communist Party by war's end and an existing struggle between Sofia and Belgrade regarding control over Macedonia led to conflict between the two parties. From a position of relative weakness versus the KPJ, the BRP in mid 1946 acceded to the KPJ and KPM's demands that Pirin receive an education campaign like that ongoing in the People's Republic of Macedonia to instill a Macedonian national consciousness definitively in the region. But while temporarily admitting defeat on the question of nation-building, the BRP would retain control over state-building. It would be the Bulgarian Workers' Party's firm administrative control over Pirin that would serve as the vehicle to shape and then reshape a Macedonian national consciousness.

Chapter Seven

The “Macedonianization” Campaign and the Triumph of Centralization, 1946-1952

“There are not three Macedonias. There is only one Macedonia and its major part is represented by the established Macedonian People’s Republic.”

—Georgi Dimitrov, Prime Minister of Bulgaria and General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, 1946¹

On December 16, 1949, a firing squad shot Traicho Kostov. Until the beginning of the year he had served as First Deputy Prime Minister and Political Secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Now, however, a tribunal found him guilty of “anti-party activity.” His position and party membership had already been stripped from him after the Plenum June 11-12 when fellow member of the Central Committee, Vassil Kolarov, accused him of nationalism, anti-Soviet sentiment and factionalism. Prominent in the formal indictments laid against Kostov in his subsequent December trial was the charge of conspiracy to allow Yugoslavia to annex the Pirin region.² Kostov was accused of conspiring with Edvard Kardelj, a Yugoslav ideologue, confidant of Tito and now Foreign Minister in 1948, to create for a federation that would allow

¹ Georgi Dimitrov, quoted in Milena Mahon, “The Macedonian Question in Bulgaria,” *Nations and Nationalism* 4:3 (July 1998), 393.

² “Iz obvinitelniiia akt na Glavna prokuratura na Narodna republika Bulgariia sreshtu Traicho Kostov, Ivan Stefanov, Nikola Pavlov, Nikola Nachev, Boris Hristov, Tsonio Tsonchev, Ivan Gevrenov, Ivan Tutev, Blagoi Hadzhipanzov, Vasil Ivanovski i Iliia Baiatseliev,” November 28, 1949, in Liubomir Ognainov, ed. *Borbi i chistki v BKP (1948-1953)* (Sofia: Glavno upravlenie na arhivite pri ministerskiia suvet, 2001), 193-195. See also in the same volume, “Doklad na sekretaria na TsK na BKP Vulko Chervenkov pred plenum na Tsentralniiia komitet za izvodite ot protsesa sreshtu ‘grupata’ na Traicho Kostov,” January 16-17, 1950, 208-212.

Yugoslavia to swallow Bulgaria, starting with Pirin. The terms of this Balkan Federation, the charges read, had been drafted by American intelligence agents in league with a special emissary of Hitler.³ Despite his protestations of innocence, Kostov was found guilty and sentenced to death.⁴

The rationale for Kostov's trial and execution were complex and, as is explored below, revolved around a succession crisis within the Bulgarian Communist Party and a larger series of purges in 1949-1951 that accompanied the transition to Stalinism. But the inclusion of charges relating to Pirin, no matter how ridiculous on the surface, was deliberate. His trial reflected the complete rejection of a Macedonian national consciousness by the Bulgarian state and Communist Party. And yet, three years earlier both state and party had endorsed cultural politics in Pirin that sought to foster a sense of "Macedonianism." What had changed?

The attempt by the post-war Communist government to shape identity in Pirin was the climax of the consolidation of Sofia's central authority over the region. This chapter traces the history of these two stages of the Macedonianization cultural campaign in the years 1946-1952. In its first stage, Sofia took control of the local autonomy that had reemerged during the Second

³ Adam Ulam, *Titoism and the Cominform* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 90. See also Beljanovski, 234-236. The accusation that Kostov spied for American Minister Donald Heath led to the US withdrawing the minister and refusing to appoint another diplomatic envoy of this rank until 1960, in protest of the charge.

⁴ Kostov was tried with 10 other Communist Party officials, but only he received the death penalty. His refusal to agree to a public confession of his crimes (he renounced an initial confession) may have led to his death sentence, as the other nine officials were given lighter sentences. All were quietly rehabilitated in 1956.

World War. This phase, from 1946-1948, saw the Bulgarian Worker's Party (BRP) initially agree and collude with the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) to foster a Macedonian national consciousness in Pirin. In negotiations between the two states, Bulgaria agreed that Pirin would be eventually transferred to the Yugoslav People's Republic of Macedonia (NRM). This planned transfer placed Pirin in the center of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations for a decade, uniquely among Bulgarian provinces.⁵ This policy of broad "cultural autonomy" for the district was unique in the country, and led in 1947 to a centrally-directed campaign to encourage a Macedonian identity. During this initial period the BRP entrenched its power in the region and carried out its transition to a Soviet-style system of state enterprise and collectivized farms. Conflicts over details of the new cultural policies emerged not only between Sofia and Skopje but also between Sofia and local Pirin Communist organizations.

The BRP was forced by wartime circumstances, as noted in Chapter Six, to cede broad administrative autonomy over policies in Pirin to local administrative bodies over 1944-1946. This de-centralization was reversed by 1948; in 1947, the central government took the step of eliminating provincial government entirely, restructuring local government through smaller districts (*okolii*), a structure maintained through 1949 (see Figure 19, next page). The Tito-Stalin Split in 1948 meant that the Central Committee of the BKP now shifted course with regards to the Macedonian question. The split triggered the second stage of the Macedonianization campaign, wherein the Central Committee

⁵ The southern Dobrudzha was the focus for Bulgarian foreign policy, but in a more limited fashion and only until the Peace Treaty of 1947.

Figure 19
Bulgarian Administrative Borders, 1947
Restructuring of the government leads to the elimination of provincial government
(the *oblasti*), and restructuring of local government at the district level (*okolii*).
Only the Pirin *okolii* are labeled here.



Based on Bulgarskata akademia na naukite: Geografski institut, *Atlas Narodna Republika Bulgaria* (Sofia: Glavno upravlenie po geodeziia i kartografii pri ministerstvoto na akrhitektura i blagoustroistvoto, 1973), 7.

extinguished local autonomy in Pirin. In 1949 the Bulgarian Communist Party⁶ intervened to end any autonomous representation in Pirin that might threaten the central government's monopoly of power.

Cultural politics in Pirin thus took a new course in 1948, one that portrayed the Slav inhabitants of Pirin and any local Macedonian consciousness as part of a larger Bulgarian national identity and appropriated local symbols and history for inclusion in the latter. Sofia brought the Macedonianization campaign in its new form under direct control. The region's local officials were purged and its

⁶ The Bulgarian Workers Party was, following its merger with the Bulgarian Workers Socialist Party in 1948, titled the Bulgarian Communist Party once more.

institutions faced full-scale Stalinization under Vulko Chervenkov. Pirin Macedonians were now portrayed as part of a larger Bulgarian national consciousness. The state *tolerated* a local Macedonian consciousness, but any state sponsorship of Macedonian consciousness ended. By the 1950s the Bulgarian government would move to the position that all of Pirin embodied a strictly Bulgarian national consciousness and that a Macedonian national consciousness did not exist.

The role of Moscow in the cultural campaign in Pirin unifies historiographies in both Macedonia and Bulgaria following the *caesura* of 1989-91. Macedonian histories generally agree that Stalin's break with Tito in 1948 led to Soviet sabotage of the Balkan Federation and the end of a campaign of national cultural liberation in Pirin.⁷ Bulgarian histories broadly concur that Josef Stalin forced the "de-nationalizing" program upon Bulgaria.⁸ That Moscow and international affairs played a decisive role in shaping the campaign is generally accepted.⁹ In acknowledging their importance, however, histories of the

⁷ Beljanovski, for example, argues that to 1948 the Bulgarian approach was "*nauchna*" (scientific), while the post-1948 period was one of "*negiranje*" (denial). While correct in reproaching the reluctance of Bulgarian scholars to engage the campaign objectively, it assumes that the NRM's campaign was fundamentally correct — and that the Bulgarian government recognized it as such until 1948. See Novitsa Beljanovski, *Makedonija vo jugoslavensko-bugarskite obnosti, 1944-1953* (Skopje: Institut za natsionalna istorija, 1998), 278.

⁸ For example, see Veselin Angelov, *Hronika na edno natsionalno predatelstvo: Opitite za nasilstveno denatsionanalizirane na Pirinska Makedonija* (1944 – 1949 g.) (Blagoevgrad: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Neofil Rilski," 1999).

⁹ An extreme example of the latter approach can be found in Macedonicus, *Stalin and the Macedonian Question* (St. Louis: Pearlstone, 1948), 63. Macedonicus was in fact Ivan Mihailov, writing from exile in Italy. The international aspect of the Macedonianization campaign is generally accepted, though not always the interpretation of the campaign as directed solely by Stalin. See Evangelos Kofos,

Macedonianization campaign have generally overlooked the Bulgarian Communist Party's actual administration of the campaign. This is particularly true with regards to its other interests in the region, especially its use for educational, economic and cadre development. In addition, the Tito-Stalin Split of 1948 did not result in the immediate cession of the cultural politics of 1946-1948. Instead, it provided a pretext for Sofia to eliminate Yugoslav influence in internal affairs while continuing the campaign in a new form for over half a decade.

From start to finish, however, both stages of the Macedonianization campaign demonstrated an unprecedented intervention by state institutions in addressing issues of "Macedonian identity." Although the central government had sought as early as 1934 to integrate Pirin administratively and affirm a Bulgarian national consciousness, the events of 1946-1952 put the BKP in a position to complete the task. Local history would no longer be left to the interpretation of local organizations and individuals, but would be required to fit a "party line." In Yugoslavia's Vardar Macedonia, Stefan Troebst argues that the "cultural front" provided a successful vehicle from which a new separate entity – the People's Republic of Macedonia — derived its legitimacy.¹⁰ In Pirin, the "cultural front" was

Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia: Civil Conflict, Politics of Mutation, National Identity (New Rochelle: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1993), and Beljanovski, *Makedonija*, 102-119, 191-248. A moderate view is Milena Mahon, "The Macedonian Question in Bulgaria," *Nations and Nationalism* 4:3 (1998), 393.

¹⁰ Troebst, Stefan. "Yugoslav Macedonia, 1943-1953: Building the Party, the State and the Nation," in Melissa Bokovoy, Jill Irvine and Carol Lilly, eds., *State-Society Relations in Yugoslavia, 1945-1992* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 244. Indeed, although the Communist past remains a flashpoint in contemporary politics in the Republic of Macedonia, the legacy of the NRM as a Macedonian state is still valued.

the vehicle by which the BKP was able to establish definitely first the presence of the Bulgarian state, and then a Bulgarian national consciousness.

Consolidating Communist Rule and the Macedonian Question

Over the fall of 1946 and spring of 1947, the Bulgarian Worker's Party (BRP) consolidated its hold on power, eliminating the need to share power in a coalition through the Fatherland Front. Two events in September signified the Party's growing political power. The first was a referendum on September 8, 1946, asking if a republic should replace the existing Kingdom of Bulgaria. Nearly 92 percent of the eligible voters turned out, and nearly 96 percent voted in favor of a republic, an impressive demonstration of the Communist's ability to mobilize and direct the public.¹¹ The following month, the elections of October 27 saw a similarly high level of voter turnout providing a majority not only to the Fatherland Front (70 percent) but also to the BRP. It received approximately 55 percent of the vote nationwide.¹² An open opposition was still tolerated after the election, as required by the terms of the Allied Control Commission.¹³

The signing of the Peace Treaty of 1947 on February 10 in Paris opened the way to dispensing with this coalition. The treaty abrogated the Allied Control Commission and provided the BRP with British and American recognition for the

¹¹ Kalinova, 68.

¹² Kostadinova, 96-97. Kostadinova notes that the weakest district for the opposition parties was Gorna Dzhumaia. Michael Boll emphasizes that in the elections, the opposition parties emerged as the second largest bloc with 28 percent of the votes, and that the American legation saw this as evidence that the opposition could survive. Boll, *Cold War*, 182-183.

¹³ Oren, *Revolution*, 94.

Communist-dominated Fatherland Front government, although it placed *de jure* limitations on Bulgaria's sovereignty.¹⁴ This included Part III of the Treaty, restricting the government's military forces, but to British and American eyes the significant clause was in Article 3 of Part III, which required the Fatherland Front to acknowledge and defend "basic freedoms" in the country. By accepting these constraints the BRP secured the dissolution of the Commission, thus depriving both the United States and United Kingdom of a vehicle or legal pretext for intervening in Bulgarian internal affairs.¹⁵ Both countries had anticipated that the Treaty would require the Communists to allow free and multi-party elections. But the limitations in the peace treaty proved largely unenforceable by either the United States or United Kingdom, even in terms of the disarmament clauses.¹⁶ Although the Soviets retained the *de facto* power to intervene directly in Bulgarian administrative matters,¹⁷ the BRP could claim final control over state institutions by the spring of 1947. It moved quickly to eliminate the remaining power of the opposition parties.

In Pirin, the party had acted in 1944-1945 to put parallel Communist and Fatherland Front committees in place over the political and police apparatus and

¹⁴ Treaty of Peace with Bulgaria: February 10, 1947. Cited from Charles Bevan, ed., *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America 1776-1949* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1968).

¹⁵ Boll, *Cold War*, 184.

¹⁶ See Georgi Dimitrov, diary entry for December 7, 1948, in Banac, *Diary*, 452-453, regarding Soviet-Bulgarian cooperation on rearmament.

¹⁷ For example, demanding that Foreign Minister Petko Sainov, a career diplomat and academic, be removed in 1946 because "we do not trust him" for his bourgeois tendencies. See Molotov, telegram of March 15, 1946 to Georgi Dimitrov in Banac, *Dimitrov*, 397-398. Sainov resigned on March 31 and returned to academia.

eliminate VMRO elements. But much of this apparatus remained relatively autonomous, with local organs taking their own initiatives, as happened throughout Bulgaria in this initial postwar period. Beginning in mid-1946 the Central Committee of the BRP began to bring provincial government under its control. In Pirin, the vehicle by which the central government would do this was through the “cultural autonomy” granted to the region as part of negotiations with Yugoslavia.

Belgrade’s Federation and Sofia’s Pirin

Already in November and December 1944, the Yugoslav and Bulgarian Communist leaderships had entered negotiations on the form of a future Balkan Federation. The Yugoslavs proposed a federal state of seven republics (including a Bulgarian Republic), while the Bulgarians proposed a “bilateral” joint state between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.¹⁸ These ambitious proposals were deferred until the Second World War had ended.¹⁹ Both Parties did agree to certain key principles including a customs union and the transfer of Pirin to the new People’s Republic of Macedonia. Georgi Dimitrov recorded in his diaries that:

¹⁸ On the negotiations, see Tsola Dragoicheva, *Povelia na dulga: spomeni i razmisli*, Stefan Zhelev, ed. (Sofia: Partizdat, 1979), 350-370. Dragoicheva was a member of the Central Committee of the BRP/BKP from 1936 to 1948 and a member of the Polituro from 1940 to 1948, and was directly involved in the negotiations. This, and other Macedonian-related material from her memoirs was translated and published as Tsola Dragoicheva, *Macedonia, Not a Cause of Discord but a Factor of Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation: Recollections and Reflections* (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1979). A direct Macedonian response can be found in Vančo Apostolski, *Tsola Dragoicheva and her Memoirs Based on Greater Bulgarian Nationalist Positions* (Belgrade: Jugoslovenska stvarnost, 1979).

¹⁹ Dimitrov, diary entry of October 27, 1944, in Banac, *Dimitrov*, 341.

Bulgaria agrees to the annexation of the Macedonian territories belonging to it since 1913 to Macedonia within the limits of Yugoslavia if its population desires it.²⁰

In a future federation, this was envisioned to be a united Macedonian republic that would potentially include Aegean Macedonia, equal to other constituent republics.

The Central Committee of the BRP was concerned that this policy allowed both the Yugoslav central government and the leaders of the new Macedonian Republic to criticize or openly interfere with Bulgarian policy in Pirin. Agreement was, however, deemed necessary to ensure a future federation.²¹ Over 1946-1947, Dimitrov, now Prime Minister as well as leader of the Central Committee, continued to support a unified Macedonia.²² *Pirinsko Delo*, the state newspaper for the Pirin region, published the text of a telegram from Lazar Kolishevski on its first page that promised the future inclusion of Pirin within the NRM.²³ By the spring of 1947, the paper announced that “fraternal union” between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia was eminent, and that Pirin would soon be joined directly to the People’s Republic of Macedonia.²⁴

Pirinsko Delo was correct. Both Communist parties, having completed the domestic assumption of power, could now return to ambitious foreign policy goals such as the Balkan Federation. In the summer of 1947 negotiations were

²⁰ Dimitrov, diary entry of December 21, 1944 in Banac, *Dimitrov*, 347-348. In return, Bulgaria would receive the western enclaves lost to Yugoslavia in 1919. Note the entries of April 15, 1946 (402-403) and June 7, 1946 (405-406).

²¹ TsDA, Fond 1b, opis 6, a.e. 15.

²² As noted in Chapter Six, Dimitrov’s parents emigrated from Pirin and he himself was of Macedonian origin.

²³ *Pirinsko Delo*, January 6, 1947, 1.

²⁴ *Pirinsko Delo*, March 24, 1947, 4.

reopened on both the federation and the transfer of Pirin. These culminated in Tito and Dimitrov signing the Bled Agreement on August 2 and the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance on November 27. The first treaty put forward a common line on Macedonian issues to further the cause of cultural union between Pirin and the NRM.²⁵ The Treaty of Friendship, in Tito's words, "brought the two countries so closely together that a federation would only be a formality."²⁶ The two agreements proved the high point of the federalization project.

The BRP agreed to take a "Macedonian course" in Pirin as part of its pursuit of a Balkan Federation. This policy stated that Pirin was a Macedonian region inhabited by Macedonians. What remained was for the state to ensure that this policy, negotiated between the governments of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, was carried out within Pirin by the local party organizations and state institutions.

Defining "Macedonia" in Pirin

In August 1946 at its Tenth Plenum, the Central Committee of the BRP announced a policy of "cultural *rapprochement*" between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in Pirin.²⁷ Specifically, this meant that local administration must now adopt certain practices of the NRM. *Pirinsko Delo* would adopt "the Macedonian

²⁵ Banac, *Dimitrov*, 420.

²⁶ Kofost, 161.

²⁷ See "Pismo na Hristo Kalaidzhiev do Vulko Chervenkov s harakteristika na politikata na KWP(k) po makedonskiia vuprosv v Pirinska Makedoniia...," "Doklad na Georgi Dimitrov pred X razshiren plenum na TsK na BRP(k)...," and "Reshenie na X razshiren plenum na TsK na KWP(k) po makedonskiia vuprosv," Vasil Giozelev et. al., eds., *Makedonskiat Vuprosv*, 87-91.

style,” the newly codified Macedonian language and orthography. School and language policies would change, and local officials would work with those in Skopje.²⁸ The Central Committee communicated the new policies to local committees and organizations, and assigned them the practical task of implementing them.²⁹

The ultimate goal of the campaign was openly stated: to prepare Pirin for union with the People’s Republic of Macedonia (NRM). *Pirinsko Delo*, for example, on October 14 featured not only a prominent photograph of NRM Premier Lazar Kolishevski on the front page, but also reported on the events locally and in Skopje commemorating the “national holiday” of October 11, the anniversary of the NRM’s founding.³⁰ The provincial BRP began a campaign to establish October 11 as a “national holiday” within Pirin as well.³¹ One internal memorandum encouraged local leaders to recognize that “October 11 is the brightest and greatest date of our Macedonian nation.”³² Pirin was an inseparable part of the new Macedonian republic and of the Macedonian nation. The policy of the BRP was to ensure that this was expressed by not only the party’s membership, but by the population of Pirin as well.

The census of 1946 was crucial to demonstrating mass “objective support” for the Central Committee’s position on Pirin’s ethnic composition. In June, Ordinance 1597 stipulated that local authorities collect statistics to show the unity

²⁸ “Pismo na Hristo Kalaidzhiev,” in Giozelev, 88-89; also TsDA, Fond 1b, opois 1, a.e. 9, l 132-134.

²⁹ TsPA, Fond 1, opis 13.

³⁰ *Pirinsko Delo*, October 14, 1946, 1.

³¹ Angelov, 191-192.

³² ODAB, Fond 108, opis1., a.e. 12, l 98.

of Pirin Macedonia with Vardar.³³ Such directives are, Bulgarian historians have long argued, proof that the campaign was “falsified” by the Communist regime. This position argues that the 1946 census was “an administrative formality” at most, the Central Committee having pre-determined the desired results.³⁴ Of the 252,575 people registered by the census as residents of Pirin, 160,651 (63.6 percent) listed their ethnicity as “Macedonian,” 54,425 (21.6 percent) as “Bulgarian” and 28,924 (11.5 percent) as “Pomaks.”³⁵ This provided the clear majority that justified the cultural campaigns. But despite the directives and the results of the census, some uncertainty may still be discerned. The census forms³⁶ contained questions on both ethnicity and “mother tongue.” Although a majority listed Macedonian as their ethnicity, only 28,611 listed “Macedonian” as their native language.³⁷ Most of those who listed Macedonian as their native language lived in rural areas, suggesting that the urban-rural divide, as noted in Chapter Two, continued. Greater access to state-sponsored education over 1913-1934 combined with more active state promulgation of a Bulgarian national consciousness over 1934-1944 achieved some success in urban areas.³⁸

³³ ODAB, Fond 59K, opis 1, a.e. 50.

³⁴ Georgi V. Dimitrov, ‘Za taka narechenata ‘kulturna avtonomiia’ v blagoevgradski okrug, 1946-1948 g.’ *Istoricheski Pregled* 35:6 (1979), 75.

³⁵ Glavna direktsiya na statistika, *Statisticheski godishnik na Bulgarskoto Tsarstvo* (Sofia, Glavna direktsiya na statistika, 1947). For a critical view, see Angelov, 143.

³⁶ A copy of the 1956 census form and instructions, which remained similar to that of 1946, is available online. IPUMS-International, “Bulgaria 1956 Population and Housing Census,” *European Census Forms*, n.d., November 2004 <www.ipums.umn.edu/international/world_census_forms/Europe/Bulgar56.pdf>

³⁷ Angelov, 152.

³⁸ ODAB: Fond 1K, opis 1, ae 39, 81-82; OPA, Fond 1, opis 1, a.e. 3, l 8-20.

This self-identified Macedonian population varied in strength from area to area. Census percentages, verified by reports of the provincial school inspector, suggested that Petrich (an *okoliia* bordering on the new People's Republic of Macedonia) was "85-90 percent" Macedonian in terms of population, Sveti Vrach 80-85 percent, Nevrokop 60-65 percent, Razlog 55-60 percent and Gorna Dzhumaia 45-50 percent.³⁹ The eastern rural areas that had sought autonomy in the past were now less likely to express a local, autonomous Macedonian identity compared to Petrich and Sv. Vrach — towns closer the new Macedonian republic.⁴⁰

Internal correspondence reveals a degree of uncertainty within the provincial apparatus how to define a "Macedonian."⁴¹ The disparity between the ethnic and linguistic categories suggests lingering confusion. One official bluntly argued that "The people don't make a differentiation between Macedonian and Bulgarian."⁴² The goal now set by the Bulgarian Communists was to clarify what it was to be Macedonian, much as the KPM was clarifying it in the People's Republic of Macedonia. Policies would be put in place to validate the "orthodox line" as set forth by the Central Committee of the BKP, and Sofia would supervise this campaign more closely.

³⁹ Jotevski, 108-109.

⁴⁰ Gorna Dzhumaia also bordered the NRM, but the town had the largest proportion of residents born in Bulgaria outside of Pirin.

⁴¹ Angelov, 139-141.

⁴² ODAB Fond 7K, opis 1, a.e. 2, l. 115-116.

The 1947 Macedonianization Campaign in Pirin

The Central Committees of the Bulgarian Worker's Party and the Macedonian Communist Party intensified their efforts in 1947, beginning a more aggressive Macedonianization campaign in Pirin. Its aim was to eliminate the region's ambivalent attitude with regards to national consciousness and establish a common Macedonian identity between Pirin and Vardar, smoothing the eventual union of the two territories. As a result, the Dimitrov-led leadership in Sofia fostered a series of programs in Pirin to promote a "progressive" Macedonian spirit. These programs were to be carried out by both local Party organizations or by state institutions, in conjunction with Skopje but ultimately at the instruction of Sofia.

The campaign to create a "progressive Macedonian spirit" was multi-faceted. *Pirinsko Delo* and local organizations promoted a variety of "educational and cultural platforms," including adult literacy, literacy and equal rights for women and ethnic tolerance towards Roma, Turks and Pomaks.⁴³ The Communist government issued periodicals, literature and set up other facilities to advance a Macedonian consciousness. The cultural campaign encouraged Pirin to embrace a newly defined Macedonian language and heritage. The state apparatus was seeking, in other words, to ensure that the realities of expression matched what had been determined by the 1946 census.

⁴³ All three of these campaigns were emphasized between 1946 and the mid-1950s, with periodic articles in *Pirinsko Delo* exhorting future progress and recording progress to date.

Sofia's efforts to transform national consciousness Pirin drew heavily upon the NRM's earlier cultural campaign in Vardar Macedonia during 1944-1946. The Macedonian republic had already established a body of literature, if still small, in a newly codified Macedonian literary language. Works on communist theory had also already been translated. Both could easily be imported to Pirin. The first area of the "cultural front" became new bookstores, starting with *Makedonska kniga* ("Macedonian Book") in Gorna Dzhumaia. It opened in 1947 on the major Communist holiday of May 1.⁴⁴ Although interest in them was initially weak,⁴⁵ additional bookstores were opened — as well as a series of "Macedonian reading rooms" across Pirin.⁴⁶ The latter were often created through the addition of Macedonian-language works to each local *chitalna* (as a reading room was now referred to, instead of the Bulgarian *chitalishte*). The rural majority thus received increasing access to this new Macedonian literature although the total number of Macedonian-language volumes in the reading rooms remained low.⁴⁷ To complement the book campaign, in 1948 officials in Skopje and Blagoevgrad arranged for a tour of authors from the People's Republic of Macedonian writing in the Macedonian literary language that was now to extend to Pirin.⁴⁸ They

⁴⁴ *Pirinsko Delo*, May 5, 1947, 4.

⁴⁵ Angelov, 175, cites TsPA Fond 1, opis6, a.e. 246, l. 6, a report from the local BRP committee stating that the bookstore was poorly attended following its opening.

⁴⁶ Jotevski, 115.

⁴⁷ *Pirinsko Delo*, Dec 7, 1947, 3, ran an article on the reading room in Shtip (in the NRM), and role of Macedonian authors and books on it. This was intended as a "call to arms" for the villages and towns in Pirin.

⁴⁸ *Pirinsko Delo*, April 26, 1948, 1.

arranged a total of 34 lectures and discussions, all to encourage the reading and sales of literary works.⁴⁹

In August 1946, the local Communist leadership in Pirin followed the NRM in using film and radio to complement literature. The first Macedonian-subtitled film was shown that month, *Borbata na jugoslavskite partizani* (The Struggle of the Yugoslav Partisans).⁵⁰ More far-reaching was a directive that the larger towns put up loudspeakers to broadcast Radio Skopje for those inhabitants who lacked their own home radios.⁵¹ This effort would now be extended in 1947, with the active use of mass media in the province to encourage the new language and national consciousness. *Pirinsko Delo* had already adopted a “Macedonian line” in 1946. Now, over 1947-1948, it increased the number of articles emphasizing the Macedonian nature of the local population. The article “*Makedonskata natsionalnost*” on July 21, 1947 was typical of the approach. It emphasized a Macedonian historical tradition that linked the “revolutionary” struggles of progressive members of VMRO in the nineteenth century to the struggle against Fascism and to the contemporary attempt to build both a progressive state and to create a unified Macedonia.⁵² Articles in *Pirinsko Delo* and *Nova Makedonia* repeatedly praised historical figures with “Macedonian credentials” (such as Dame Gruev, Gotse Delchev and Yane Sandanski) while seeking to establish proper “revolutionary credentials” for them, as seen in Figure 20.

⁴⁹ Mitrev, *Pirin*, 72.

⁵⁰ Mitrev, *Pirin*, 74.

⁵¹ ODAB, Fond 1b, opis 1., a.e., 9, l 132-134.

⁵² *Pirinsko Delo*, July 21, 1947, 4.

Figure 20:
Macedonian Symbols in the Service of Communism:
"33 Years from the Death of Yane Sandanski"

Front cover of *Nova Makedonija*, April 22, 1948

As had VMRO and the dictatorships of Zveno and Tsar Boris before them, the Communists now sought to use Macedonian symbols. Now, however, these became part of the foundation of a national consciousness by supplying the heroes for a new national pantheon, an appropriate history justifying the new nation (and Communist regime) and a source of state symbols such as postage stamps, a new national anthem and toponyms.

On September 2, 1947 *Pirinsko Delo* took the further step of printing a limited amount of material in Macedonian (although initially using the Bulgarian Cyrillic alphabet). The Central Committee of the BRP had specifically authorized

and required this step in order to encourage the use of the new language, although compromising on the use of the new orthography until supplies of the new typeset could be arranged. A weekly “*Vremeto od Vardarska Makedonija*” (“The News from Macedonia”) feature was launched.⁵³ This was followed in June 1947 by the first feature-length articles in Macedonian, and from July 28, 1947 onwards four pages each issue were published entirely in Macedonian.⁵⁴ The newspaper’s status as the premier local publication distributed throughout the region meant that thousands of readers were now presented with the opportunity to learn the Macedonian literary language.

The provincial Central Committee began planning for a state-sponsored “Provincial Macedonian National Theater” company in late 1946.⁵⁵ The theater was finally opened on November 7, 1947, providing a venue dedicated to plays on Macedonian themes and in the Macedonian language. It also would facilitate visits by acting companies from the People’s Republic of Macedonia.⁵⁶ The theater was intended to be a vehicle for promoting Macedonian heritage. *Pirinsko Delo* reported that with its opening, “All of the Pirin region of Macedonia celebrates a great cultural victory: the opening of the provincial Macedonian National Theater.”⁵⁷ An article in *Nova Makedonija* the following year noted that the theater was important in creating a “Macedonian spirit in Pirin.”⁵⁸ In reality the

⁵³ *Pirinsko Delo*, September 2, 1947, 8.

⁵⁴ *Pirinsko Delo*, May 5, 1947, 4.

⁵⁵ Note *Pirinsko Delo*, January 20, 1947, 3, on the public announcement of plans for the theater.

⁵⁶ Joevtski, 118.

⁵⁷ The opening speech reported in *Pirinsko Delo*, November 10, 1947, 10.

⁵⁸ *Nova Makedonija*, May 24, 1948, 4.

actual repertoire was more varied than narrowly “Macedonian themes,” and not limited to ethnic or political themes.⁵⁹ This variety helped it obtain some wider popularity. The company made three tours during 1947-1948 in Pirin, traveling to the six towns plus large villages such as Belitsa and Sklave. A further tour was made to Bulgarian cities outside of Pirin.⁶⁰

Educating Bulgaria’s Macedonians

The major element of the Macedonianization campaign was its educational program. In August 1947, the Communist-controlled Bulgarian *Subranie* passed a law requiring that the Macedonian literary language and Macedonian national history be taught as compulsory subjects in schools in Pirin.⁶¹ The provincial committee of the BRP accordingly removed its existing school inspector for demonstrating too much of a “Bulgarian spirit” and appointed a new one who would work towards preparing “local Macedonian cadres” for the task.⁶² The intention was to inspire a spirit of “Macedonian nationality” among the young.

In this endeavor, provincial and local school authorities were not only obliged to satisfy Sofia’s directives, but also those from Skopje. The NRM took

⁵⁹ Mitrev provides a list of the first productions; while the opening *Pechalbari* was a Macedonian drama on emigrant workers, ensuing productions included “*Gde-to v Moskve*” (“Somewhere in Moscow,” a Russian comedy), “*Narodni Poslanik*” (“The People’s Messenger,” a Serbian comedy), “Deep are the Roots” (an American drama) and “*Melkaya burjuaziya*” (“Petty Bourgeois,” a Russian drama.) Mitrev, 69-70.

⁶⁰ *Nova Makedonija*, July 24, 1948, 6. Also Mitrev, 70.

⁶¹ Mitrev, 72.

⁶² ODAB, Fond 1b, opis 6, a.e. 364.

an active part in shaping the new curriculum, providing not only materials but also teachers. Ninety-three instructors were sent to Pirin and divided among several programs. This policy merged with the ongoing expansion of the district's schools to result in almost universal school attendance for primary-school children in the province for those from self-identified "Macedonian" and "Bulgarian" families. With the exception of Gorna Dzhumaia, high attendance figures were recorded for other ethnic groups as well (see Table 8).

Table 8
Percentage of school-aged children enrolled in primary schools by ethnicity, 1946-47⁶³

Town	Ethnic group					
	Macedonian	Bulgarian	Turk	Roma	Jewish	"Macedonian Muslim" ⁶⁴
Gorna Dzhumaia	90.82%	86.34%	14.29%	47.83%	100.00%	87.07%
Nevrokop	94.15%	98.73%	87.33%	92.24%	100%	86.01%
Petrich	91.09%	98.40%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Razlog	98.36%	100.00%	n/a	96.12%	n/a	75.35%
Sv. Vrach	90.21%	94.48%	n/a	80.69%	n/a	n/a
Total	92.4%	96.55%	82.90%	83.01%	100%	82.70%

Teachers from the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were appointed by the Central Committee of the KPM, in consultation with the Pirin Communist leadership, to schools in Razlog, Bansko, Petrich, Sveti Vrach, Nevrokop and Gorna Dzhumaia as well as to a newly-established pedagogical school in Gorna Dzhumaia.⁶⁵ Additional teachers were later added for the villages, beginning with Koprivlen, Eleshnitsa, Breznitsa and Satovcha.⁶⁶ For more advanced studies,

⁶³ Mitrev, Pirinskiya, 189; Jotevski, 156-159. Both base their figures on *Dokumenti na oblastniia uchilishchen Inspektorat na Pirinska Makedonija ot 1946-47 g.*, Arhiv na Makedonija, Fond Ministerstvo za prosveta na NRM-Skopje, dokumenti za Pirinska Makedonija 1944-1953.

⁶⁴ E.g., Pomak.

⁶⁵ *Pirinsko Delo*, December 15, 1947, 1.

⁶⁶ Angelov, 209.

148 students were placed in secondary schools in the NRM, and 149 students received scholarships to attend Skopje University.⁶⁷ Adult learning courses in the Macedonian language and culture were established in Gorna Dzhumaia (16 courses), Nevrokop (five), Petrich (four), Sveti Vrach (three), Razlog (two), Bansko (one) as well as in several of the larger villages.⁶⁸

Skopje's influence extended to curriculum and textbooks, as local schools were directed by Sofia to teach a "Macedonian" line. For example, the geography curriculum should stress explicitly that, "In Pirin Macedonia live mostly Macedonians."⁶⁹ Textbooks were edited to emphasize elements in Macedonian history. In the third form, for example, the medieval Second Bulgarian Empire of Tsar Samuil was to be characterized as a "state of the Macedonian Slavs" and any references to it being Bulgarian were removed. Similarly in the seventh form Saints Kliment and Naum, medieval figures involved in spreading Orthodox Slavic-language education in the First Bulgarian Empire, were no longer to be referred to as Bulgarians in textbooks; nor were the Miladinov brothers, who had encouraged Slavic-language education in Macedonia in the nineteenth century.⁷⁰ The nineteenth century VMRO was now to be regarded as a specifically ethnic-Macedonian revolutionary organization and a precursor to the current national liberation efforts.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Mitrev, 72.

⁶⁸ Mitrev, 74.

⁶⁹ ODAB, Fond 86K, opis 1, a.e. 4, l. 83, 85.

⁷⁰ Angelov, 185-186.

⁷¹ Frequent articles in *Pirinsko Delo* followed *Nova Makedonija*'s line in stressing the "revolutionary" continuity between VMRO in the nineteenth century, the Communist VMRO faction of the 1920s and the contemporary Communist

Instructions distributed by the provincial school inspector indicated which Macedonian literature was to be read in addition to Bulgarian literature. In a similar fashion, Macedonian songs were to be sung, and Macedonian radio broadcasts were to be made available to students. In addition, alongside the portraits of Stalin, Dimitrov and Tito, one of Lazar Kolishevski was to be hung in classrooms.⁷² Through such efforts at the schools, a new generation could be educated in Pirin that would embrace a Macedonian national consciousness. This campaign, however, met with the resistance of the older generation who began to contest a centrally defined and imposed identity.

Local resistance and acceptance

The policies of the Central Committee of both the Bulgarian Worker's Party and the Communist Party of Macedonia sparked local opposition in Pirin almost from the beginning.⁷³ Part of the resistance came from the gradually diminishing ranks of former elements of VMRO and other opposition groups. But local Communist Party and Fatherland Front officials were soon complaining against the new course. In response to the declaration at the Tenth Plenum, the county Party organization in Sveti Vrach protested openly, "This is not the

parties. The inclusion of Pirin in the NRM was inferred to be the natural result of VMRO's struggles to liberate Macedonia.

⁷² ODAB, Fond 232, opis 1, a.e. 12, l 151.

⁷³ It also sparked opposition within the central party apparatus in Sofia; *Rabotnichesko Delo* on October 9, 1947, criticized opposition within government ministries to the Macedonianization campaign, referring to it as "Bulgarian super-chauvinism."

time.”⁷⁴ The Fatherland Front city committee⁷⁵ in Gorna Dzhumaia in 1947 similarly suggested that it was a “mistake” for the provincial committee to claim that local inhabitants were Macedonians.⁷⁶ One member of the county committee in Petrich said:

With affection to the party organization, I say as a party member: the directive of the party to write Macedonia on this question [on nationality], cannot be logical.⁷⁷

Such internal arguments mirrored registered complaints and informants about opposition to the identity campaign. For people in Pirin who had previously accepted specific state institutions, the government’s new policies caused confusion. As a mill worker from Razlog complained:

But why do they get us to write [that we are] Macedonians and to study Macedonian, when we fought for Bulgaria, for Bulgarian schools?⁷⁸

Bulgarian scholars have emphasized complaints within the local party as demonstrating the perceived national identity of local inhabitants.⁷⁹

Another reason for such complaints was the concern of local party members that the “Macedonianization campaign” threatened to alienate the people of Pirin from the new Communist government. This could overturn previous attempts to centralize local power in the hands of the Bulgarian Worker’s Party. Continued activity by local elements of VMRO, who agitated

⁷⁴ OPA, Fond 6, opis 1, a.e. 29, l. 22.

⁷⁵ The Fatherland Front organizations were maintained even after the complete Communist seizure of power, continuing as late as 1989 when Communist rule was overturned.

⁷⁶ ODAB, Fond 109K, opis 1, a.e. 20, l. 161.

⁷⁷ ODAB Fond 7K, opis 1, a.e. 2, l. 124.

⁷⁸ Cited in Angelov, 141; the original is OPA Fond 4, opis 1, a.e. 2, l. 37.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Angelov.

against the Macedonianization campaign, might serve as rallying points against Communist rule.⁸⁰ Georgi Hadzhidimov, the Secretary of the County Committee of the BRP in Razlog reported that locally “the Communists are Macedonians, but the *Zvenoists*, Agrarians and *Mihailovisti* are Bulgarians.”⁸¹ Local teachers complained of the “anti-Bulgarian aspect” of the educational campaign.⁸² Some of the local courses to teach Macedonian faltered for lack of interest on the part of teachers and school administrators.⁸³ Worries about disinterest were sufficient for the provincial committee to order that local organizations gather information about individuals with “fears of unification with Macedonia.”⁸⁴ The local sector chief of *Durzhavna Sigurnost* (State Security) in 1948 issued an alarming report that indicated a significant number of “bandits” and “associates” (91 in all) were resisting the BRP’s policies in the region.⁸⁵ Such internal problems were complicated by the very division of the Communist world itself into factions in 1948.

Pirin Between Two States: the Tito-Stalin Split

Relations with Yugoslavia shaped Bulgaria’s cultural policies in Pirin. Pursuing better bilateral relations with Yugoslavia, Prime Minister Dimitrov

⁸⁰ Note Angelov, 187-188, on VMRO activities in the province after the war.

⁸¹ Angelov, 146.

⁸² ODAB, Fond 570K, opis 1, a.e. 10, l. 108.

⁸³ ODAB, Fond 231K, opis 3, a.e. 2, l. 21.

⁸⁴ ODAB, Fond 1K, opis 1, a.e. 20, l. 10.

⁸⁵ The report, “Doklad na Ivan Gulev, April 23, 1948” is reproduced in full in Vesselin Angelov, *Otlichen bulgarin s imeto Gerasim: Stranitsi ot vuoruzhenata suprotiva streshtu komunisticheskia rezhim v Pirinska Makedonija* (Sofia: n.p., 2002), 160-169; the original is archived as *Archiv na Ministerstvo na vutresnite raboti*, D. 357, tom 4, l. 125-129.

acceded to the Yugoslav line on Pirin. This direction ended in 1948 as a result of the “Tito-Stalin” split and the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Soviet Bloc and the Cominform. This Communist Information Bureau had been founded in 1947 to organize a combined international policy for the various national Communist parties, but now became a means of encouraging Tito’s overthrow.⁸⁶ Josef Stalin now ordered the Bulgarian authorities to join the “anti-Tito” bloc and apply pressure in order to bring about an internal coup in Yugoslavia.

Stalin had long shown irritation with Tito’s independence. The latter’s foreign policy included an aggressive tendency to confront the West, despite Stalin’s insistence on “veto power” over Yugoslav foreign policy in March 1945.⁸⁷ Tito followed his own course in post-war negotiations over the status of Trieste and disputed US over-flights of Yugoslav territory, the Yugoslav military going so far as to shoot down two US aircraft in the summer of 1946. He also intervened in the Greek Civil War, providing training facilities and logistical support to the Communist National Popular Liberation Army (*Ethnikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos*

⁸⁶ The Comintern, its predecessor, was closed in 1943 in a Soviet gesture of good will towards its western Allies. The Cominform was opened as a Soviet response to deteriorating relations with the United States, particularly the Truman Doctrine of March 12, 1947. Reflecting Yugoslavia’s prestige in the Soviet Block, the new organization was headquartered in Belgrade. It was subsequently moved to Bucharest in 1948 where it was used as a forum to attack Yugoslav deviation. In a gesture of Soviet reconciliation towards Yugoslavia, it was closed in 1956.

⁸⁷ On Yugoslavia’s confrontations with the United States and Italy, see Lampe, *Yugoslavia*, 240-241; on Tito’s policy towards the Cominform, see Geoffrey Swain, “The Cominform: Tito’s International?” *The Historical Journal* 35:3 (1992), 652.

Stratos, or ELAS).⁸⁸ In 1948 Tito moved Yugoslav troops into Albanian territory, suggesting that he was planning to widen the scope of the Greek war in defiance of Stalin's wishes.⁸⁹

In ideological terms, Tito publicly rejected the Soviet strategy of taking power through "top-down" popular fronts in which local Communist parties worked in coalition with non-Communist political parties to take power gradually. Instead, he used Yugoslavia's membership in the new Cominform to encourage Communist parties in other states to work "from below," taking control of local organizations and broadening a mass base to gain enough strength to take power.⁹⁰ Such a policy not only would lead to further confrontation with the West, but could potentially diminish Soviet control over Communist movements outside of the Soviet Union.

Stalin himself moreover disliked and mistrusted leaders like Tito who were drawn from the local party apparatus. He preferred established loyalists bound to Soviet interests and its intelligence service during exile in the Soviet Union during the 1930s-1940s. From the Yugoslav point of view, Stalin and the Soviet leadership were increasingly overbearing in their determination to control internal Yugoslav policy as well as international Communist policy. Soviet pressure to create joint economic ventures set up in Yugoslavia, such as the JUSTA airline

⁸⁸ On the Macedonian dimension of the Greek Civil War, see Koliopoulos, 221-266; a broader view on Yugoslavia is Kofos, 166-188 and Amikam Nachmani, "Civil War and Foreign Intervention in Greece," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25:4 (1990), 510-512.

⁸⁹ Ivo Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 37-41.

⁹⁰ Swain, 643-645.

and JUSPAD Danubian shipping company, were seen with justification as efforts to control internal services and as a means for Moscow to siphon off capital for its own purposes.⁹¹

Stalin extended his criticism of Tito to include Yugoslavia's leading role in forging a Balkan federation. Stalin rebuked both Dimitrov and Tito for the early negotiations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. He privately and publicly chastised Dimitrov, in particular, with regards to the Bled Agreement of 1947.⁹² Criticism of any possible federation outside of Soviet control increased in early 1948 as tensions between the Soviet and Yugoslav leadership grew.⁹³ The Bled Agreement was negotiated independently of Soviet direction, and was suspect as one of Tito's "independently-minded" policies.⁹⁴ The Greek historian Evangelos Kofos suggests that the Bulgarians were unaware of the break until June, but opportunistically took advantage of it afterwards to oppose Yugoslav designs on Pirin.⁹⁵ In fact, a break seems to have been developing for some time on the Bulgarian side. Already in April 1948, Dimitrov told members of the Central

⁹¹ On Soviet-Yugoslav relations, see Vladimir Dedijer, *The Battle Stalin Lost: Memoirs of Yugoslavia, 1948-53* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 73-93. On JUSTA and JUSPAD, see Lampe, *Yugoslavia*, 246; Lampe places greater weight on the role of Yugoslav-Soviet economic relations in worsening relations between the two states in the lead-up to the split.

⁹² Stalin's early criticism can be seen in the diary entry by Dimitrov for June 7, 1946 in Banac, *Dimitrov*, 405-406; on Bled, see Dimitrov's diary entries from August 8, 1947 and Stalin's letter of August 12, 1947 in Banac, *Dimitrov*, 421-423.

⁹³ Note Dimitrov's diary entries for January 24, 1948 and February 10, 1948, which show Stalin's increasingly hostile view of a "Balkan federation" and concerns over how federation would effect Soviet foreign policy. Banac, *Dimitrov*, 435, 436-444.

⁹⁴ Lampe, *Yugoslavia*, 247;

⁹⁵ Kofos, 188-189.

Committee that: “Pirin is no longer just a Macedonian question, but a question of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relationships and of the federation.”⁹⁶ In light of Soviet-Yugoslav tensions, Dimitrov took an increasingly critical line toward the Macedonianization campaign. On June 14, two weeks before the formal split, he had already “prepared a letter to the party committee in the Pirin region concerning the speech of the Macedonian prime minister [Lazar Kolišhevski].”⁹⁷ On June 28, 1948, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was formally expelled from the Cominform.

The result was an immediate reshaping of cultural politics regarding Pirin. Sofia now ended any activities that favored the “Macedonianization” as directed from the People’s Republic of Macedonia. The new line was spelled out at the Fifth Congress of the BKP in December 1948, when Georgi Dimitrov stated that:

The people of the Pirin district for centuries [have] felt themselves tied economically, politically and culturally to the Bulgarian people and do not desire their separation before the realization of a federation between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.⁹⁸

Bulgaria’s accommodation with Yugoslavia was now finished, and the Central Committee undertook a new course: the elimination of dissidence. The Tito-Stalin split raised the specter that other Communist leaders might deviate from the acceptable line. The Central Committee now undertook to eliminate Yugoslav influence within the country, particularly in Pirin. And chief among those judged

⁹⁶ TsDA Fond 216b, opis 1, a.e. 56.

⁹⁷ Dimitrov, diary entry of June 14, 1948 in Banac, *Dimitrov*, 448.

⁹⁸ Georgi Dimitrov, *Political Report to the Fifth Congress*, 62, quoted in Kofos, 191.

as sympathetic to Tito were the Bulgarian Communist officials who had carried out the Macedonianization campaign, on Dimitrov's orders.

The Kostov Trial and the Purges

The Tito-Stalin split formed the background for vicious internal purges in both Yugoslavia and the Soviet bloc.⁹⁹ In Bulgaria, the purges marked the transfer of power away from the post-war “triumvirate” of Georgi Dimitrov (prime-minister and president of the Central Committee of the BKP), Traicho Kostov (first deputy prime-minister and political secretary of the Central Committee) and Vasil Kolarov (president from 1946-1947, deputy prime minister and minister of internal affairs after 1947). The purges targeted both the policies supporting the Macedonianization campaigns and the individuals who carried them out.

Kostov, the only “non-Muscovite,” was the only one of the triumvirate purged. Dimitrov, now terminally ill, publicly accused Kostov of nationalism in January 1949, a charge probably inspired by Soviet criticism of Tito. A series of speeches by Dimitrov and others questioned Kostov’s past actions as a member without portfolio in the Bulgarian cabinet from 1945 to 1947 and as a still-sitting member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In June 1949 State Security (*Durzhavna Sigurnost*) agents of the Interior Ministry formally detained and then imprisoned Kostov until his trial in November.¹⁰⁰ As noted above, he was executed in December, ostentatiously for his role in carrying out policies, such as in Pirin, the BKP had formally approved.

⁹⁹ For the Yugoslav purges, see Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito*, *passim*.

¹⁰⁰ On the Kostov trial, see Bell, 103-107 and Kalinova, 113-116.

The Kostov trial reflected the transfer of power to a new generation of Bulgarian Communists seen as loyal to Stalin. Kostov's chief crime was that he had been a "home communist" who had remained in Bulgaria during the 1930s and Second World War and not one of the Muscovite exiles. The latter now stepped in to ensure that Kostov would not, as had seemed likely until even the previous year, succeed Georgi Dimitrov as head of the Bulgarian Communist Party.¹⁰¹ Dimitrov for his part died before Kostov, on July 2, 1949. Vasil Kolarov, the last member of the triumvirate, briefly succeeded him as prime minister but was himself terminally ill and died in February 1950. Power passed to Vulko Chervenkov, a Stalinist with long years in the Soviet Union. Chervenkov now replaced most of the senior party officials under Dimitrov with individuals loyal to him, generally party members who had spent the 1930s in exile in the Soviet Union.¹⁰²

Kostov's trial was merely the most prominent in a purge that now raged on. 100,000 of the BKP's 500,000 registered members in 1948 lost their party membership by the end of 1951.¹⁰³ The new leadership sought not only to remove supporters of their internal rivals, but also to "ideologically cleanse" the party. The influence of now-banned Bulgarian political parties would be eliminated, and any members who displayed the "taint of Tito" would be removed. At the upper levels of the party, involvement in the Macedonianization campaign meant the danger of being accused of "Kolischevism," loyalty to Lazar

¹⁰¹ The Bulgarian Worker's Party merged with the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party in 1948, and the original name was restored.

¹⁰² Bell, 106.

¹⁰³ Oren, 113.

Kolishevski, who remained Secretary of the Macedonian Communist Party and Premier of the Yugoslav People's republic of Macedonia. Krustio Stoichev, a candidate-member of the Central Committee, was removed on such a charge.¹⁰⁴

Within Pirin, the local bodies that had carried out the Macedonianization campaign were systematically targeted. The provincial committee of the BKP and specific members were criticized as having been “permissive to [the] Mihailovists,” in other words insufficiently dedicated to eradicating any lingering VMRO circles in the province.¹⁰⁵ A detailed internal evaluation followed in 1950 of 430 “administrative members” of the provincial BKP, including the district committee, county committee, military membership and leaders of student organizations. This report stated each member’s positions on the Macedonianization campaign.¹⁰⁶ Much of the recent membership carried the additional risk of being labeled “opportunistic” for joining the Party once it was in power, and thus being dismissed. In 1951, 1,390 ‘candidate members’ and party members in Pirin were so rejected. This figure compares to 1,748 in Sofia and 1,733 in Burgas, provinces which had well over double the population of the Pirin district.¹⁰⁷ Local county committees provided a series of reports to the Central

¹⁰⁴ “Reshenia na plenum na TsK na BKP za izmeneniiia v sustava na Politbiuro I Tsentralniiia komitet,” January 16-17, 1950, 213-214, *Borbi i chistki v BKP*.

¹⁰⁵ “Reshenie No 51 na Politbiuro na TsK na BKP po proverkata na rukovodnite kadri v Sandanska okoliia.” 232-23, *Borbi i chistki v BKP*

¹⁰⁶ ODAB, Fond 2b, opis 1, a.e. 5, l. 15-70.

¹⁰⁷ “Iz pretsenkata na otdel “Partiini, profsuiuzni i mladezhki organi” na TsK na BKP za rezultatite ot prochistvaneto na selskite partiini organizatsii i na purvichnite partiini organizatsni v granichnite okolii na Blagovgradski, Burgarski, Vrachanski, Plovdivski i Sofiiski okruzi,” Nov 26, 1951, *Borbi i Chistki na BKP*, 384-387. See also “Reshenie No 38 na Politbiuro na TsK na BKOP vuv vruzka s obsledvaneto na rukovodnите kadri I metodite na rabota v okruzhnata partiina

Committee on “unprofitable party activities” of local comrades, playing out the vicious party in-fighting of the purges on a local scale.¹⁰⁸ In the process, the remnants of VMRO were reduced as well. Two party members in Blagoevgrad (Ivan Bashilev and Petur Deredzhiev) were found guilty in 1953 of having been members of VMRO before 1934, and were purged from the party.¹⁰⁹

Reclaiming Pirin

Just as the Tito-Stalin Split was to frame the internal purge of BKP members, the policies of the “Macedonianization campaign” were to be purged as well. Vladimir Poptomov (born in the village of Belitsa, near Razlog), a BKP leader in the Gorna Dzhumaia provincial leadership, had questioned the wisdom of the campaign in the past. He was now promoted into the national leadership.¹¹⁰ He framed the new Bulgarian policy in a circular of July 8, 1948:

Our party however cannot approve the dictates of Greater-Macedonian nationalist ambitious propaganda, which spurs the present directives of the People’s Republic of Macedonia for the unification of the Pirin region with the NRM.¹¹¹

organizatsiiia – Blagoevgrad,” February 28, 1952, 397-399, for an additional list of individuals dismissed in 1952.

¹⁰⁸“Dokladna zapiska ot otdel “partiini, profsuiuzni i mladezhki organi” do Sekretariata na TsK na BKP za obsledvane na rukovodnite kadri v Blagoevgradski okrug,” April 13, 1951, *Borbi i Chistki na BKP*, 335-336.

¹⁰⁹ “Resheniia na Kontrolnata komisiia pri TsK na BKOP vuv vruzka s vuzrazheniia na izkliucheni chlenove ot BKP, Feb 10, 1953,” *Borbi i Chistki*. Ivan Ivanov Bashilev is number 56 on the list of decisions, Petur Deredzhiev is number 58. Number 78 explains that Petur Pristov is removed from the party for being a police officer in the interwar period; servants of the old regime were being purged as well.

¹¹⁰ In April 1949, Poptomov would become the Foreign Minister, in part for his activist line in 1948-1949 with respect to Yugoslavia.

¹¹¹ TsDA, Fond 214b, opis 1, a.e. 69, I 1.

The Sixteenth Plenum of the BKP's Central Committee met in July and discussed the party's policies in Pirin. Much of the existing policy was subject to internal criticism and repudiated.¹¹² Instructions were sent to the provincial party Central Committee in Gorna Dzhumaia and to county committees on the immediate policies to take with regards on the Macedonianization campaign and on the NRM's past involvement in the campaign.¹¹³

On July 21, 1948 the Central Committee approved an 18-page denunciation of the Yugoslav "Macedonian policies" regarding Pirin and the errors in local policy created through foreign influence.¹¹⁴ Institutions and directives inspired by the People's Republic of Macedonia were to end. This included the return of Yugoslav Macedonian teachers, the closure of the Provincial Macedonian National Theater (which reemerged as a Provincial Bulgarian Theater) and the end of Macedonian-language articles in *Pirinsko Delo*. The resolution specifically addressed the question of autonomy in Pirin. While admitting that cultural autonomy had been allowed, the resolution sharply denied that the province had enjoyed any separate administrative authority:

[In this case] cultural autonomy was given without territorial-political autonomy. ... Through every instruction of the government and state organs from above and in every report of the state organs from within the Pirin region was that it was a regular administrative province, as are Plovdiv, Pleven, Burgas and other provinces in Bulgaria."¹¹⁵

The intent of the Central Committee was to eliminate foreign influence in the cultural campaign, which in fact would continue into the early 1950s. Sofia's

¹¹² TsDA, Fond 146b, opis 2, a.e. 247, l.106-108.

¹¹³ TsDA, Fond 216b, opis 1, a.e. 570, l. 181-183.

¹¹⁴ TsDA, Fond 214b, opis 1, a.e. 490.

¹¹⁵ TsDA, Fond 214b, opis 1, a.e. 490, l. 8.

concern focused on continued Yugoslav claims to Pirin, not unsurprisingly, given the rapidly escalating “cold war” between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. A three-page article published in Skopje’s *Nova Makedonija* at the beginning of September 1948 criticized the new policies in Pirin and accused the Bulgarian government of breaking past agreements on the status of the province.¹¹⁶ In November, it explicitly compared the current policies in Pirin to Ivan Mihailov’s “fascist” rule in the 1920s and 1930s.¹¹⁷ This would set the tone for an ongoing exchange of denunciatory articles centered around periodicals in Skopje and Gorna Dzhumaia, now renamed Blagoevgrad in honor of the Pirin origins of the founder of the Bulgaria Communist Party. The BKP accused Macedonia of creating a “terror campaign” to spread Macedonian culture, forcing “Bulgarian” inhabitants in Vardar Macedonia to adopt a new “Serbianizing” language and culture.¹¹⁸ The NRM counter-charged that Bulgaria was suppressing the national liberation of Pirin Macedonia by orchestrating its own “terror campaign” to prevent locals from using their Macedonian language or expressing their Macedonian national consciousness .¹¹⁹

While requiring an end to foreign influence, the BKP did not determine that all aspects of the cultural campaign would cease, simply that the “mistaken” policies would. A report from the Razlog district committee in July 1948 stated that the party would still continue the “heroic Macedonian liberation struggle” in

¹¹⁶ *Nova Makedonija*, September 2, 1948, 1-4.

¹¹⁷ *Nova Makedonija*, November 26, 1948, 3.

¹¹⁸ *Pirinsko Delo*, February 11, 1951, 3.

¹¹⁹ The first charge is made in *Nova Makedonija*, May 21, 1950, 1. The second is made in *Nova Makedonija*, June 1, 1953, 2.

the “spirit of Gotse and Yane.”¹²⁰ But a “Bulgarian line” was now to be asserted within the cultural campaign. A Macedonian ethnic identity remained tolerated, as long as it did not originate in Skopje. Although teachers from the NRM had been deported, the Macedonian language classes were allowed to continue — although no longer as compulsory subjects. Topics in Macedonian history (such as the nineteenth century “liberation struggle”) could be taught, but not the “Yugoslav” version prevailing over 1947-48. Materials that deviated from the new line were eliminated.¹²¹ What would be stressed now was the linkage of the Macedonian liberation struggle to the Bulgarian liberation struggle, and the appropriation of Macedonian symbols and history within a Communist expression of Bulgarian national consciousness. Pirin’s experience was seen as an integral part of a Bulgarian revolutionary tradition. The pivot of this new cultural campaign can be summarized in a slogan used in 1952:

Pirin Macedonia, the only free part of Macedonia, must be a militant base for the struggle for peace, democracy, the indivisibility of Macedonia and the unity of the Macedonian people.¹²²

Correspondingly, new Bulgarian policies stressed both the historical and the progressive aspects of Macedonian identity but rejected the Yugoslav People’s Republic of Macedonia’s version of unification.¹²³

¹²⁰ ODAB, Fond 4b, opis 1, a.e. 2, l. 64a/15-64a/18.

¹²¹ Kofos, 190, notes that the Macedonian texts imported over 1946-1948 were burned; the BKP at the same time withdrew questionable material — including interwar newspaper collections and issues of *Pirinsko Delo* from 1944-1948 — from provincial libraries, maintaining copies only at the Natsionalna biblioteka in Sofia.

¹²² TsDA, Fond 1b, opis 64, a.e. 160, l. 22-23.

¹²³ Along these lines, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) allied with the BKP in 1949 during the last phases of the Greek Civil War. The KKE line was that the

Pirin's heritage was now recast to create a rival tradition. This initially took the form of common references in *Pirinsko Delo* to the deeds of Damian Gruev, Gotse Delchev, Yane Sandanski and to key events in Macedonian history such as the Ilinden Uprising.¹²⁴ Occasional articles in national publications such as *Rabotnichesko Delo* followed as well.¹²⁵ Such articles were linked to regular features on the deeds of Bulgarian liberation heroes of the nineteenth century such as Vasil Levski and the Communist leaders of the twentieth century such as Dimitur Blagoev and Georgi Dimitrov.

More dramatic public efforts were to follow. Renaming campaigns over 1949-1951 changed Sveti Vrach to Sandanski in 1949, Nevrokop to Gotse Delchev and, in 1950 as already mentioned, Gorna Dzhumaia as Blagoevgrad. The village of Belitsa became Ilindentsi in 1951. A plethora of streets, plazas, industrial works and schools were named after Sandanski, Delchev and other historical Macedonian figures of suitable ideological pedigree. Prominent monuments were built to commemorate individuals, Partisans and the "national liberation struggles" against the Ottomans and Fascists.¹²⁶ The program's purpose was to link the history of the Macedonian revolutionary organizations to the Bulgarian revolutionary tradition. This arguably was why Gorna Dzhumaia,

Macedonian people of Greece were allied with the Greek people in resisting imperialism, and that Yugoslav policies were attempts to "divide" this alliance. See Barker, 128-129; Koliopoulos, 238-239.

¹²⁴ Generally, such articles were run on the anniversaries of these figures' birth and death, and Ilinden was commemorated annually on August 2.

¹²⁵ For example, the article "Makedonskiat narod naslednik poucheniiata na Gotse Delchev i Yane Sandanski," *Rabotnichesko Delo*, May 6, 1951, 9.

¹²⁶ This included the monument referenced in the introduction. Gotse Delchev's statue in Blagoevgrad was sculpted by Krum Dermendzhiev and erected in 1955.

the largest town in the region and the provincial capital, was renamed not for a member of VMRO but for Dimitur Blagoev. When the provincial governments were restored in 1949, a “Gorna Dzhumaia” (soon Blagoevgrad) *oblast* was created but under the firm control of the central government.

Figure 21
Bulgarian Administrative Borders, 1949
The *oblasti* are restored in 1949, including the Gorna Dzhumaia (Pirin) *oblast*; these boundaries remain to the present.



Based on Bulgarskata akademia na naukite: Geografski institut, *Atlas Narodna Republika Bulgaria* (Sofia: Glavno upravlenie po geodeziia i kartografii pri ministerstvoto na akrhitektura i blagoustroistvoto, 1973), 7.

A history that stressed broad revolutionary themes meant increasing marginalization of the role of the Macedonian movement, particularly those elements (such as the post-war VMRO) that did not fit the new historiography. As such, little of this new Bulgarian history of Macedonia was incorporated into the Communist national history of Bulgaria as a whole. While the Central Committee

of the Poliburo officially recognized the fiftieth anniversary of the Ilinden Uprising in 1953, no member of VMRO was considered significant enough to list in the related announcement that commemorated and listed the national “revolutionary fighters against Turkish slavery, fascism and imperialism.”¹²⁷ The state’s new historical policy was intended less to foster a new Macedonian historiography as it was to provide ammunition to criticize the historical approach promulgated in Yugoslavia.¹²⁸

The other element in the BKP’s retrenching of its Macedonian policy in Pirin was to emphasize new economic development there. This was an early priority of the local postwar Party organs but had soon been eclipsed by the cultural campaigns.¹²⁹ The pace of investment now accelerated after 1950. Electrification was extended to the large villages. Industrialization advanced in the region, with a number of state-funded and managed facilities built over 1949-1952. The actual economic advance can be overstated. Despite state encouragement and investment in infrastructure and enterprises, centrally planned development in Pirin met with only mixed success. The increase of the postwar urban population by 4 percent (as shown in the censuses of 1946-1956) barely matched Bulgaria’s overall urban growth.¹³⁰ Only Blagoevgrad, which

¹²⁷ TsDA, Fond 1b, opis 6, a.e. 1801, l. 15-16 (on Ilinden), 5-13 (list of national heroes). Ilinden was noted on other occasions as well, e.g., a.e. 472, l 10-11; a.e. 5102, l. 73.

¹²⁸ See, for example, the article “Kak se falshifitsira istoriiata” (“How to falsify history”) in *Pirinsko Delo*, January 8, 1958, 3-4.

¹²⁹ Georgi V. Dimitrov, “Za taka narechenata ‘kulturna avtonomiia’...,” 77.

¹³⁰ Also note that “village,” “town” and “city” were and remain administrative terms in Bulgaria, not designations of size. Pirin’s towns were usually smaller than

grew to 21,833 inhabitants in the 1956 census, could be justifiably be called a town of reasonable size. Melnik was also considered a town but possessed a mere 522 inhabitants that same year. The five “towns” did increase their size by 35 percent, and Blagoevgrad grew by 54 percent as the *oblast* capital, but this figure comparable to the growth rate before centralization, as Table 9 (next page) shows.

Urban area	Population				
	1920	1926	1934	1946	1956
Bansko	4,532	5,062	5,540	6,161	6,805
Gorna Dzhumaia	7,009	9,384	9,974	14,190	21,833
Melnik	721	722	521	472	522
Nevrokop	6,156	7,165	8,767	11,115	12,577
Petrich	7,169	8,380	10,120	13,493	16,401
Sv. Vrach	1,533	2,780	4,703	7,447	10,630
Yakoruda	3,800	4,150	4,572	5,291	5,507

The state’s management of economic affairs now defined “Macedonian policy” in Pirin. Regional organs of the BKP stressed the modernization and future of the province, even when setting forth the new historical line. The BKP and the KPM now both used measures of industrialization and economic development to criticize each other. Skopje highlighted its own economic progress and criticized the Bulgarian administration of Pirin as backward and regressive; officials in Blagoevgrad and Sofia would reverse these charges. Both *Nova Makedonija* and *Pirinsko Delo* engaged in regular exchanges over the

towns elsewhere in Bulgaria, so that a 4 percent growth rate could be achieved by urbanizing hundreds or thousands rather than tens of thousands.

¹³¹ Figures derived from TsDA Fond 453K, opis 2, *passim* and the respective volumes of the *Statisticheski godishnik na Bulgarskoto Tsarstvo*.

status of development in Pirin, but these became almost ritualistic events with the same charges routinely brought forth by both sides.¹³²

In 1952, the Macedonianization campaign was effectively finished. Party and state support ended for any remaining separate Macedonian local consciousness in the region. Remaining elements, such as the “Macedonian” ethnic category remaining on Bulgarian census forms, were considered sufficiently non-controversial enough that the party did not act to eliminate them for another decade. Macedonian symbols were now considered synonymous with Bulgarian symbols; its revolutionary heroes a minor but still valued part of Bulgarian history. With a Stalinist regime at its height in that year, the Central Committee felt secure in that it had definitively imposed its centralizing model of both state and nation on Pirin. From now on, state policy decreed that the people of Pirin would be Bulgarians from Macedonia rather than the reverse.

¹³² For example, see *Pirinsko Delo*, “Vardar makedoniia e nai-bednata chast na Jugoslaviia,” (“Vardar Macedonia is the poorest part of Yugoslavia”), December 12, 1951, 3. A more detailed Macedonian critique of development in Pirin is provided in Mitrev, *Pirinskija*, 362-378.

Conclusion

Creating Bulgaria's Macedonia

The leaders and founders of the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization ... launched the slogan for autonomy[,] ‘Macedonia for the Macedonians’ ... not as a Macedonian national community but as a slogan for struggle, for equal rights and freedoms ... I speak of the left democratic current in the Macedonian revolutionary movement, whose main founder, as is well-known, was Gotse Delchev.’

— Todor Zhivkov¹

The Macedonians fight
for their own rights! ...
Macedonia is liberated
and liberated it lives!”

— Third and sixth stanzas of “Today over Macedonia,”²
anthem of the Republic of Macedonia

When the Bulgarian census of 1966 was taken in Pirin, “Macedonian” was no longer an acceptable option to enter under “nationality.” Although Bulgarian encouragement of any Macedonian ethnic group had already effectively ended in 1952, the category had remained on the census of 1956. The change in census-taking a decade later set off a diplomatic furor between Belgrade and Skopje on the one hand and Sofia and Blagoevgrad on the other.³ Each side accused the other of attempting to spread a false national consciousness in Pirin and distort the true identity of the region’s inhabitants. As this study shows, such nationalist

¹ Speech by Premier Todor Zhivkov to the Central Committee, March 11-12 1963, in TsDA fond 1b, opis 5, a.e. 567, l 274-289.

² Written by Vlado Maleski in 1943 or 1944, “Denes nad Makedonija” was adopted in 1944 by the People’s Republic of Macedonia in Yugoslavia and maintained after independence in 1991.

³ “Macedonian” remained acceptable in the 1956 census, but as an empty gesture endorsed by the Soviet Union as part of Soviet Premier Nikita Kruschev’s attempts to reconcile the Soviet-Yugoslav split. Language and education policy in Pirin remained unchanged. On the post-1966 furor, see Stefan Troebst, *Die bulgarisch-jugoslawische Kontroverse um Makedonien, 1967-1982* (Munich: Südost-Institut, 1983), 1-53.

rhetoric is misleading. There were multiple, competing identities in Pirin before these Communist governments began their rivalry over the “true” national consciousness of Pirin.

Group identity was not a novel concept in Ottoman Pirin, where confessional and regional consciousnesses were well established. But instabilities within the Empire and the influence of the spreading national awakenings prompted the Slavs of Pirin to reconsider established boundaries. The transition into nationhood began through a cultural, then paramilitary mobilization largely organized by local elites, but influenced by the evolution of Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian national movements outside the *vilayets*. Ottoman traditions of provincial autonomy led local elites to expect similar autonomy, first as a Macedonian component in the Slavic-language movement and then as part of the guerilla struggle against the Ottoman Empire.

State-building and nation-building were intertwined in Pirin, and sometimes competed one with the other across the first half of the twentieth century as this study shows. The goal of this cultural, then paramilitary, mobilization for a new group identity as a nation was to create a new state. But national consciousness in Pirin remained unclear in the late nineteenth century, as did the ultimate form of the state that educated elites, then armed bands, fought for. Historiography in Macedonia and Bulgaria has argued that VMRO and the Supremacists fought over issues of nationalism. The Marxist framework of the Communist era depicted the two groups as driven by a conflict between

Communist and bourgeois ideology.⁴ This study argues that these groups were divided, between each other and internally, over the question of not just “Who were the Macedonians,” but “Who should rule in Macedonia?” Having enjoyed long autonomy under the Ottoman Empire, local elites were of no mind to relinquish it. They sought to retain and hold power, the “administrative mobilization” of state making, even when their national sympathies remained unclear.

These local elites were unusually successful in retaining autonomy, challenging assumptions about any smooth and steady increase in state power through the twentieth century. Struggles between the province and central government over autonomy and centralization impacted successive mobilizing events that shaped national consciousness. Under the military demands of the First World War and the state’s near-collapse in 1918-9, attempts to integrate Pirin began in 1912 but faltered and the Macedonian paramilitary re-emerged. While VMRO’s Central Committee was arguably uncertain as to the ultimate identity of Pirin’s inhabitants as Macedonians, “Bulgaro-Macedonians” or (unhyphenated) Bulgarians, its leadership was not ambivalent in seeking as much practical autonomy from the government as possible. The *Zveno* and royal dictatorships of the 1930s did succeed in dismantling VMRO’s administrative framework but had only a foreshortened opportunity to establish firm control of

⁴ Historiography explicitly linked historical events in relation to contemporary Communism. For example, Hristo Andonov-Poljanski, ed., *Documents on the Struggle of the Macedonian People for Independence and a Nation-State*, 2 vol. (Skopje: Kultura, 1985), includes the memorable chapter title “The People’s Anti-Feudal Liberation Struggle against Byzantium.”

the state over Pirin. The stresses of the Second World War undermined the enterprise and gave local autonomy a new lease on life. Its last years and the longer period of autonomy before and after the First World War preserved, even strengthened feelings of a local consciousness long after every other province of Bulgaria had been brought under the firm control of the centralizing ministries of Sofia.

It was the Communist regime's assumption of power within the Fatherland Front of 1944 that would establish a clear national ideology in the province. In Pirin, there is a clear affinity between the centralizing dictatorships of the 1930s and the new Communist regime: both sought to establish the rule of the central government in the region, and both saw defining and controlling local national consciousness as one aspect of this rule. The front page of *Pirinski glas* regularly featured Tsar Boris' portrait to 1944; Georgi Dimitrov's portrait would continually dominate the cover of *Pirinsko delo* after 1944. What appears as a discontinuity in histories when the focus is on Sofia appears as continuity when viewed from Pirin.

Facing domestic weakness, the Bulgarian Worker's Party was forced to concede to the local Communist committees' desire for autonomy. At a diplomatic disadvantage, the BRP conceded as well to new Yugoslav formulations of Macedonian national consciousness. But this was a response to the Party's post-war weakness, and the BRP sought to take back these concessions. The Skopje-inspired "Macedonianization" campaigns of 1946-1948 were the vehicle by which the BKP re-established its control over local

Communist committees, many of whom protested against the campaign and the encouragement of a Macedonian national consciousness. Successful in re-establishing central control, the Central Committee of the BKP was then able to use the opportunity of the Tito-Stalin split to turn a course away from the new Macedonian nation, arguing for a “Bulgaro-Macedonian” consciousness in Pirin.

By 1952, the key elements of the identity campaign had been eliminated as part of Bulgaria’s transformation to Stalinism. For the BKP, establishing the “proper” identity and past for Pirin reflected a broad concern with using history to justify the Communist regime. Bulgarian scholars now offered proofs that Gotse Delchev and Yane Sandanski were socialist heroes favoring the respective national identity and state project. At the same time, they sought to disprove similar Macedonian claims.⁵ Establishing a Bulgarian national consciousness in Pirin tied the region into the necessary myths of Bulgaria’s revolutionary past.⁶

The diplomatic disputes that began in 1967 and lasted through the Cold War were *pro forma* defenses of this established narrative. Bulgaria and Yugoslavia would seek to outrival each other throughout the Communist era in turning their respective portions of geographic Macedonia into showpieces. Blagoevgrad’s city center was rebuilt in the 1980s to demonstrate (particularly to Skopje, across the western border) not just the region’s economic progress but

⁵ This theme is explored further in James Frusetta, “Divided Heroes, Common Claims: IMRO Between Macedonia and Bulgaria,” in John Lampe and Mark Mazower, eds., *Ideologies and National Identities: the Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003.

⁶ On Communist national ideology’s relationship to the writing of history, see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), particularly 76, 237-239.

also the inhabitants' acceptance of state authority and a Bulgarian national consciousness.

Bulgaria's transition from Communism in 1989 and the Republic of Macedonia's independence in 1991 ended the almost ritualistic exchanges between Sofia and Belgrade. Fear and uncertainty in the two capital cities over Pirin re-entered common political discourse, as government officials in the new independent Macedonia talked wistfully of "re-unification" and nationalist groups in Bulgaria denounced the "falsified" Macedonian language and history. But questions of national consciousness in Pirin itself have largely faded, the legacy of 40 years of firm centralized state control that continues in the post-Communist period. The national party that assumed VMRO's name after 1989 polls better outside of Pirin than within it.

As I write, both Kaufland and METRO — German hyper-market chains — are preparing to open large stores in Blagoevgrad, not only to serve the market in the province but to attract shoppers from across the Macedonian and Greek borders. Local storeowners fear this will result in the elimination of local business. Growing concerns about globalization and Westernization are voiced in local politics and the pages of *Struma*, the region's most popular newspaper. After 1952, Sofia has successfully asserted the state and a Bulgarian national consciousness in Pirin. The next round in the contest between centralization and autonomy, however, awaits as Bulgaria prepares to join the European Union in January 2007 and local elites in Pirin question whether the benefit to the region will outweigh the inherent loss of control.

Glossary of Foreign Terms

<i>andartes</i>	Greek term for guerilla fighters.
<i>boiar</i>	Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian and Romanian term for a noble.
<i>cheta</i>	Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian and Macedonia term for an armed band. Plural, <i>cheti</i> .
<i>chetnik</i>	Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian term for a guerilla fighter.
<i>chiflik</i>	Turkish term for a large hereditary agricultural estate.
<i>chorbadzhia</i>	“Provider of soup;” Bulgarian (from Turkish) term for a local notable.
<i>Durzhavna Sigurnost</i>	“State Security;” Communist secret police and internal security militia.
Exarchate	Bulgarian Exarchate Church, founded in 1870.
<i>haiduk</i>	Bulgarian term for a bandit (although without pejorative connotations).
<i>kaza</i>	Ottoman sub-district following administrative reforms of 1864.
<i>komitadzhi</i>	Bulgarian term for a guerilla fighter (“committee-man”).
<i>kurdzhaliistvo</i>	“Time of the Kurdzhali;” Bulgarian term for the instability of the 1790s-1820s caused by mutiny in the Ottoman army by irregular soldiers.
<i>millet</i>	Ottoman administrative term for a confessional group.
<i>Narodno Vuzrazhdane</i>	“National Awakening;” Bulgarian term for the nineteenth century Bulgarian national movement.
<i>obshtina</i>	Bulgarian term for province.
<i>okoliia</i>	Bulgarian term for district.
<i>okrug</i>	Bulgarian term for province.
Phanariot	Term referring to Greek commercial elites from the Phanar quarter of Istanbul, Who rose to prominence in the Orthodox Church and Ottoman administration.
<i>sanjak</i>	Ottoman district following administrative reforms of 1864.
Sublime Porte	The Ottoman government, referring to the Bab-ı Ali, the open court in the Topkapı Palace where administrative issues were decided.
<i>Vurhovist</i>	“Supremacist;” Bulgarian term for members of the SMC (above).
<i>vilayet</i>	Ottoman province following administrative reforms of 1864.
<i>voivode</i>	Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian; the leader of a cheta.
<i>Vuzrazhdane</i>	“Awakening;” Bulgarian term for the nineteenth century national movement.

Glossary of Individuals

Alexandrov, Todor (1881-1924). Born in geographic Macedonia. Member of VMRO, 1904-1913. Organized VMRO bands to cooperate with the Bulgarian Army in the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913. Served in the general staff of the Bulgarian Ninth Army, 1915-1919, with the rank of general. Re-founded VMRO in 1919. Member of VMRO's Central Committee, 1919-1924. Participated in the coup of 1923.

Boris III (1894-1943). King of Bulgaria, 1919-1943. Accepted, but did not take a direct role in the coups of 1923 and 1934. Took control of the Bulgarian government through a royalist dictatorship in 1935.

Chento, Metodija (1902-1957). Member of the Yugoslav Communist Party. President of the Presidium of ASNOM, 1943. President of the Republic of Macedonia, 1946-1948.

Chervenkov, Vulko (1900-1980). Member of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Minister of Culture 1947-1949, Deputy Prime Minister 1949-1961, General Secretary of the Communist Party 1949-1956, Premier 1950-1956.

Delchev, Gotse (1872-1903). Born in geographic Macedonia. Member and leader of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, 1894-1903.

Dimitrov, Georgi. (1882-1949). Born in Bulgaria to parents from geographic Macedonia. Member of the Bulgarian Communist Party. President of the Communist International, 1934-1943. General Secretary of the Communist Party 1944-1949. Prime Minister of Bulgaria, 1946-1949.

Gruev, Dame (1871-1906). Born in geographic Macedonia. One of the original founders of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Member and leader of IMRO, 1893-1906. Member of the Central Committee, 1893-1898. Fought in the Ilinden Uprising, 1903.

Kolarov, Vasil (1887-1950). Member of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Member of the postwar Central Committee. President of Bulgaria from 1946-1947, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Internal Affairs, 1947-1949. Prime Minister 1949-1950.

Kolishevski, Lazar (1914-2002). Born in geographic Macedonia. Member of the Macedonian Communist Party. Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Macedonia, 1941-1963.. Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Macedonia, 1945-1974. 1974-1979, Macedonian representative to the Yugoslav Presidency. 1979, Vice President of Yugoslavia. 1980, President of Yugoslavia.

Kostov, Traicho (1897-1949). Member of the Bulgarian Communist Party, 1920-1949. Member of the postwar Central Committee, 1944-1949; First Deputy Prime Minister and Political Secretary of the Central Committee, 1946-1947).

Liapchev, Andrei (1866-1933). Born in geographic Macedonia. Member of the Democratic Party. Prime Minister of Bulgaria, 1926-1931.

Matov, Hristo (1869-1922). Member of the Central Committee of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, 1896-1901, member from 1901-1913. Led a VMRO *cheta* in the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913. Served on the staff of the Bulgarian army in Skopje during the First World War.

Mihailov, Ivan (1896-1990). Member of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Secretary to Todor Aleksandrov, 1919-1924. Member of the Central Committee, 1924-1934. Leader of the Central Committee, 1925-1934. In exile after 1934.

Protogerov, Aleksandur (1867-1928). Member of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, 1902-1913. Led a *cheta* in the Ilinden Uprising, 1903. Member of the Central Committee, 1911-1913. Served as commander of Bulgarian occupation forces in Moravsko, Serbia, 1915-1918, with the rank of general. Re-founded VMRO in 1919, and served on its central committee to 1925. Led a faction of VMRO in opposition to Ivan Miahilov, 1925-1928.

Sandanski, Yane (1872-1915). Born in geographic Macedonia. Member and leader of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, 1895-1915. Leader of the Serres region. Fought in the Ilinden Uprising, 1903. Founder and leader of the People's Federative Party (Bulgarian), 1909-1910 in the Ottoman Parliament.

Sharlo, Metodija (1897-1944). Member of the Bulgarian Communist Party, 1920-1935. Member of VMRO(Obedineta), 1935-1941. Political Secretary of the Central Committee of the KPJ for Macedonia, 1940-1941.

Stamboliiski, Aleksandar (1879-1923). Member of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union. Leader of BANU, 1911-1923. Participated in the Radomir Rebellion of 1918. Prime Minister of Bulgaria, 1919-1923.

Stoianov, Kimon (1882-1969). Member of the Zveno movement. Participated in the *coup* of June 1934. Prime Minister of Bulgaria, 1934-1935 as leader of Zveno. Joined the Fatherland Front in 1943, and ruled as Prime Minister leading a Fatherland Front coalition from 1944-1946.

Tempo, Svetozar Vukmanović (1912-2000). Montenegrin Communist. Member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ), 1937-2000. Member of the Central Committee of the KPJ, 1940-1970. Served on the General Staff of the Partisans, 1941-1945.

Tito, Josip Broz (1892-1980). Member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ), 1919-1980. Central Committee of the KPJ, 1934-1980. General Secretary of the KPJ, 1940-1963. Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1945-1946. Minister of Defense, 1945-1953. Chairman of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the League of Yugoslav Communists, 1963-1980. President of Yugoslavia, 1953-1980.

Tsankov, Aleksandar (1879-1959). Participated in coup of 1923. Prime Minister of Bulgaria, 1923-1926, without party affiliation. Founded and led Bulgarian National Socialist Party, 1932-1939.

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Archival Holdings, Bulgaria

Tsentralen Durzhaven Arhiv, Sofia. (TsDA). The Central State Archive is central archive for government records; the former Central Party Archive was merged into the TsDA in the 1990s. Not only are the records of the central government housed there, but extensive fonds (record groups) of confiscated records of VMRO are housed there as well. Materials from the former Central Party Archive (TsPA) are indicated by a 'b.' Record collections used in this study include:

- Fond 1b Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party
- Fond 177 Ministry of Education
- Fond 178 Post, Telephone and Telegraph
- Fond 216b Vladimir Tomov Poptomov
- Fond 370 Macedonian Emigrant Organizations
- Fond 396 Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health
- Fond 403 Emigrant Societies
- Fond 496 VMRO
- Fond 1073 Macedonian Scientific Institute
- Fond 1909 Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization
- Fond 1932 Macedonian Societies

Okruzhen Durzhaven Arhiv, Blagoevgrad. (ODAB). The District State Archive of Blagoevgrad houses municipal and provincial records from the period of incorporation into Bulgaria through the present. Records of the provincial government are housed in Blagoevgrad, as are directions from and correspondence with the ministries in Sofia, and the records of local organizations. Record collections used in this study include:

- Fond 1b Central Committee of the Provincial Communist Party
- Fond 21K District Records of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health, Petrich
- Fond 26K City Municipal Government, Bansko
- Fond 28K City Municipal Government, Nevrokop
- Fond 31K City Municipal Government, Razlog
- Fond 32K City Municipal Government, Petrich
- Fond 61K Regional Directives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health
- Fond 63K District Records of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health, Gorna Dzhumaia
- Fond 108K Regional Fatherland Front Committee, Gorna Dzhumaia
- Fond 109K Local Fatherland Front Committee, Gorna Dzhumaia)
- Fond 123K Macedonian Emigrant Organizations
- Fond 125K City Municipal Government Gorna Dzhumaia
- Fond 131K City Municipal Government, Cveti Vrach

Fond 136K Provincial Court, Gorna Dzhumaia
 Fond 281K Inspectorate, Ministry of Education
 Fond 757K Macedonian-Adrianople Fraternal Societies

Archival Holdings, United States

National Archives and Records Administration, NARA II. Records of the American legation to Bulgaria are kept in NARA II on microfilm, and include semi-weekly dispatches to the State Department on internal and foreign affairs of Bulgaria. Particularly key records collections include:

RG 59, U.S. Department of State. *Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of Bulgaria, 1910 - 1944.*

The NARA records involving Yugoslavia were drawn upon in more limited fashion. The record groups include:

RG 59, U.S. Department of State. *Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of Yugoslavia, 1910 - 1929.*

RG 59, U.S. Department of State. *Records Relating to the Internal Affairs of Yugoslavia, 1930 - 1944.*

Newspapers

Makedonsko Zname (Sofia: 1932-1934)

Nova Makedonija (Skopje: 1944-1956)

Pirinski Vesti (Gorna Dzhumaia: 1934-1936)

Pirinski Glas (Gorna Dzhumaia: 1937-1940)

Pirinsko Delo (Gorna Dzhumaia/Blagoevgrad: 1945-1956)

Rabotnichesko Delo (Sofia: 1944-1952)

Revoliutsionen list (Sofia: 1934-1936)

Svoboda ili smurt (Sofia: 1922-1934)

Published Primary Material Collections and Memoirs

Several collections of documents and memoirs relating to Macedonia were published over 1944-1989; these included 1-volume and 2-volume sets released in Bulgaria and Macedonia (specifically) with documents supporting each

country's historiographical position on Macedonia. Since 1989, a number of new memoirs and collections have been released as well.

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