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The Labour Movement and the National Question: The Communist Party of Yugoslavia in Macedonia in the Inter-War Period

The history of Yugoslavia in the inter-war period appears overshadowed by the national question. Indeed, even more than sixty years later it remains difficult for scholars to see a different picture. Especially in Macedonia, where historians have a somewhat exotic view of their history and society, the national question has completely dominated all other questions of research. The labour movement and communism are seen as being so closely connected with nationalism that, for example, Ivo Banac in his book about the Cominform conflict between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, *With Stalin against Tito*, could write: "While loyalty to the USSR and Stalin was important in all Cominformist cases, Macedonian Cominformism depended above all on a positive attitude toward Bulgaria".¹ In his voluminous book *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question*, Paul Shoup argues that the Yugoslav Communist Party's eventual success depended on its establishing a coherent policy on the perplexing question of nationalism.² And Stephen E. Palmer and Robert R. King emphasize that the reasons for the weakness of the Communist Party in Macedonia prior to World War II were fundamental differences between the Macedonian communists and the party leadership in Belgrade on the Macedonian question.³ It must be admitted that these positions were based on a small quantity of official party documents available as the main source of the authors and were influenced by the international reputation of Yugoslav communism until the beginning of the 1980s. In accordance with the official Yugoslav communist ideology after World War II, the so-called "correct solution" of the national question was decisive for the victory of Tito's party. This meant that the national problem provoked internal party disputes and divisions and dominated the language of these conflicts in the inter-war period even when discussing other matters.

Even today in Macedonia national history and the history of the communist movement are seen as the same matter. Mainly interested in the history of ideas, persons and ideological debates, the historians in Skopje deal with the whole geographic space of the former Ottoman Macedonia, ignoring in this way not only state borders but also the different conditions

1 Ivo Banac: *With Stalin Against Tito. Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*, Ithaca/London 1988, p. 192. Because the Communists as well as the whole Macedonian national-revolutionary movement treated the Macedonian Slavs as a regional section of the Bulgarian nation up to the middle of the 1930s, Banac argues that the main reason for Cominformism in Macedonia was opposition to the new national policy in Yugoslav Macedonia and support for the old pro-Bulgarian option.

2 Paul Shoup: *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question*, New York/London 1968.

3 Stephan E. Palmer/Robert King: *Yugoslav Communism and the Macedonian Question*, Hamden 1971, p. 53.

of societies.⁴ In the extensive works of Ivan Katardžiev, for example, the leading historian in Skopje who has written about the inter-war period, the Yugoslav part of Macedonia is virtually non-existent. The documents and sources he uses are mainly from Bulgaria, the Western European exile or the Comintern.⁵ Nevertheless, he treats the field of his research as the immediate pre-history of the Yugoslav Macedonia of the post-World War II era. With the end of Marxist-Leninist dominance in Eastern European historiography, not only Macedonian historians but western scholars, too, tend to see the communist movement in Macedonia, if at all, primarily as a nationalist one. In this point of view communism is only a necessary vehicle to achieve nationalist aims, the affirmation of the Macedonian nation. The lack of interest in anything other than national history has led to a neglect of the labour movement as an independent social movement, the social conditions under which it developed, the social composition of the labour force and the ideological debates beyond the notorious connection with the national question.⁶

The purpose of this paper is to show that the relationship between communism and nationalism in Macedonia is much more complex and not a one-way street; that the attitude of the Macedonian communists towards nationalism was more or less an instrumental one; that it was not fundamental differences in the national question which united the Macedonian communists or separated them from the leadership in Belgrade, but rather the deeply rooted factionalism which accompanied the Yugoslav party throughout the entire inter-war period and which was as present in Macedonia as in the other regions of the country. It shall be demonstrated that the integration of nationalist elements in the propaganda during the 1930s was not an isolated Macedonian but part of a common Yugoslav communist policy.

- 4 For the development of historiography in Macedonia after 1991, see: Ulf Brunnbauer: *Nationalgeschichte als Auftrag. Die makedonische Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1991*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas*, 4 (2002), pp. 165–203; Stefan Troebst: *Geschichtspolitik und historische "Meistererzählungen" in Makedonien vor und nach 1991*, in: A. Ivanisević/A. Kappeler/W. Lukan/A. Suppan (eds.): *Klio ohne Fesseln? Historiographie im östlichen Europa nach dem Zusammenbruch des Kommunismus*, Wien (Österreichische Osthefte 1–2 (2002), pp. 453–472; Keith S. Brown: *A Rising to Count On: Ilinden Between Politics and History in Post-Yugoslav Macedonia*, in: V. Roudometof (ed.): *The Macedonian Question: Culture, Historiography, Politics*, New York 2000, pp. 143–172. The close relations between politics and history in socialist times are described in Stefan Troebst: *Die bulgarisch-jugoslawische Kontroverse um Makedonien 1967–1982*, München 1983. Even today non-governmental institutions are prohibited by law in Macedonia.
- 5 See, for example, Ivan Katardžiev: *Makedonskata nacionalno politička misla među dvete vojni*, Skopje 1991, where the author describes the development of the idea of a Macedonian national identity in the left wing of the national-revolutionary movement since the end of the 1920s. Most of the 127 documents he presents are from Bulgaria, some are from Northern Greece, but none is from the Yugoslav part of Macedonia.
- 6 A rare exception is Risto Hristov: *Trudbeničkite optšestveni sloevi vo Makedonija, 1919–1941*, Skopje 1994. The author criticizes the concentration on political history, not only in the period after 1991 but in socialist times as well, when the ideology seems to favour a different access to history. On the lack of social studies in socialist Yugoslavia in general see: Holm Sundhaussen: *Von der Politikgeschichte zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Defizite und Aufgaben der historischen Balkanforschung*, in: *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 28 (1988), no. 4, pp. 333–339.

The Development of the Communist Party in Macedonia in the 1920s

Large portions of the history of the Macedonian section of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia are still white spots. The international historiography is mainly occupied with the treatment of the Macedonian problem by the centres of the communist movement in Sofia, Belgrade and Moscow. While the different attitudes of the three communist parties of Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece toward this problem were widely discussed, the domestic situation of the Macedonian communists has been ignored.⁷ Research has concentrated on the attempts and differences of these three parties and the leadership in Moscow to exploit the nationalist discontent in Macedonia with the Yugoslav state.

In socialist times the inter-war period in Yugoslav Macedonia was treated with care by the Macedonian historians. In independent Macedonia this period is still quite an unpopular field of historical research. But with the slowly developing debate about a revision of the founding period of the People's Republic of Macedonia after World War II, a new approach to the history of the Macedonian communists in the inter-war period is possible.⁸ It is obvi-

7 See, for example, Elisabeth Barker: *Macedonia. Its Place in Balkan Politics*, London/New York 1950, pp. 45–77; Palmer/King, pp. 19–57, Shoup, pp. 13–59; L. A. Dellin: *Das Mazedonien-Problem in kommunistischer Sicht: ein Lösungsversuch im Rahmen einer Balkanföderation*, in: *Südost-Forschungen* 28 (1969), pp. 238–264; Spyridon Sfetas: *Makedonien und interbalkanische Beziehungen 1920–1924*, pp. 280–445; Evangelos Kofos: *Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia*, Thessaloniki 1964, pp. 57–94; Joseph Rothschild: *The Communist Party of Bulgaria. Origins and Development 1883–1936*, New York 1959, pp. 205–258; R.P. Grišina: *Formirovanie vzgljada na Makedonskij vopros v bolševistskoj Moskve 1922–1924 gg.*, in: *Roskijskaja akademija nauk/Institut slavjanovedenija, Makedonija. Problemi, istorii i kulturi*, Moskva 1999, pp. 142–202; Irena Stawowy-Kawka: *Historia Macedonii*, Wrocław/Warszawa/Kraków 2000, pp. 209–212.

8 On the historical debate to rehabilitate old communists, who were arrested or purged from the ranks of the Party mainly in connection with the Cominform conflict, see V. Vesković-Vangeli (ed.): *V. Naučen sobir: Panko Brašnarov. Život i delo (1883–1951)*, Titov Veles 1991; Aleksandar Koška-Krstevski: *Bogoja Fotev*, Skopje 1998; Institut za nacionalna Istorija/Opština Ohrid (ed.): *Petre Piruzemajski: Vreme, život, delo (1907–1980)*, Skopje 1997; Dimče Adži Mitreski: *Sećavanja za nastani i za ličnosti od makedonskoto revolucionerno dviženje*, Skopje 1997; the chapter “Vasil Ivanovski – Život i delo”, in: Ivan Katardžiev: *Sosedite i Makedonija*, Skopje 1998, pp. 85–146. On the rehabilitation of non-communists see: V. Ivanoski/V. Vesković-Vangeli (eds.): *Pavel Šatev. Vreme – život – delo. Prilozi od naučnijot sobir održan na 15 i 16 mart 1992 godina vo Kratovo*, Skopje 1996; O. Ivanoski (ed.): *Čento. Čovek, revolucioner, državnik. Zbornik na materiali od trkaleznata masa održana na 26.11.1991 godina vo Prilep*, Prilep 1993. – The historical discussion of the period following World War II is still rather undeveloped and mainly limited to one topic, the foreign policy: in other words, the question of the possibility immediately after the war to unite all territories of geographical Macedonia as one unit within the framework of the Yugoslav federation. This debate criticizes the Tito administration and the Macedonian political leadership during the socialist period as being not engaged enough in the aim to secure Greek and Bulgarian territories for Yugoslav Macedonia. Ultimately, this debate prevented an open discussion of domestic policy in this period and led to a strengthening of the national interpretation of history. In this way it was possible for one of the main political executors of the purges, Krste Crvenkovski, to present himself politically as very close to the victims of the purges. See: Krste Crvenkovski/Slavko Milosavljevi: *Našiot pogled za vremeto na Koliševski*, Skopje 1996, pp. 5–133. Although in the positivistic Macedonian historiography, a cult of historical sources as the real voice of “truth” prevails, an extremely abstemious use of available sources is prevalent in the above mentioned works.

ous that in the purges following the Cominform conflict between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, a younger generation of communists clashed with a group of older communists, who were more or less prominent members in the 1920s. As in the whole of Yugoslavia, the establishment of the royal dictatorship in January, 1929, was a turning point in the history of the Communist Party in Macedonia too. That event placed the communists in a rather difficult position. The party nearly collapsed. While its leaders fled abroad, the membership dropped to several hundred in all of Yugoslavia, and communists were ruthlessly hunted down and arrested by the government. But at the same time a new political generation developed, with a different social background, a new approach to politics and a more revolutionary attitude. This new generation gained control of the Yugoslav Communist Party in the late 1930s.⁹ Although the purges and arrests following 1948 marked the violent end of a long lasting conflict of different generations within the party, the Macedonian historians use the rehabilitation debate to reconcile the antagonistic points of history in the bright pantheon of national heroes. "That means", Ivan Katardžiev writes in an edition aiming at rehabilitating the old communist Panko Brašnarov, who was arrested in 1950 under the accusation of "organizing an illegal group to support the Soviet Union in the conflict with Yugoslavia" and was sent one year later to the prison island Goli Otok, "that besides all attempts to subordinate the national under the class interest of the Communist Party in Macedonia, the fight for the national liberation of the Macedonian people became the fundamental preoccupation of the Macedonian communists in the period between the two world wars, both between 1919 and 1930 and afterwards until 1941."¹⁰

In the first parliamentary elections for the constitutional National Assembly in November, 1920, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia had the greatest success in the less developed and hardly industrialized regions of the country, in Macedonia and Montenegro. In Macedonia they got 38 % of the total vote. About 25 % of the communist members of parliament were elected in Macedonia, while only 6 % of the country's population lived there. With 51,1 % in Bitola this was the only election district in the whole of Eastern Europe, where communists gained more than 50 % of the vote before 1945.¹¹ But compared to Monte-

9 This aspect is a bit underestimated in the work of Paul Shoup (see fn. 2), but in the autobiography of the later prominent dissident Milovan Djilas (*Memoir of a Revolutionary*, New York 1973, dt. Frankfurt am Main 1976), the conflict of two communist generations in the 1930s traverses the book like a thread.

10 Ivan Katardžiev: *Skica za biografijata na Panko Brašnarov*, in: Vesković-Vangeli (ed.): *V. Naučen sobir: Panko Brašnarov*, pp. 31–40, here p. 35. Katardžiev's approach to history (and that of most of his Macedonian colleagues) is characterized by a peculiar concept of personality, which separates the identity of a person from his behaviour in concrete historical conflicts. In the case of Brašnarov he argues that his personal identity developed between 1919 and 1929 and that all that happened later on is of minor importance (p. 33 and 38). In this way Brašnarov's argumentation in the Cominform conflict, that the nature of every communist party should be an internationalist one, and that the CPY is betraying the international proletarian movement (pp. 32–33) can not undermine Katardžiev's conviction that Brašnarov's main preoccupation was the Macedonian national cause and that Brašnarov deserves to join the pantheon of national heroes (p. 39). Confusingly, in the same essay Katardžiev writes that for Brašnarov the national movement was only a functional matter of the socialist revolution, p. 35.

11 See R. V. Burks: *The Dynamics of Communism in Eastern Europe*, New Jersey 1961, p. 79.

negro, the organizational framework of the party prior to World War II remained weak in Macedonia. Because of the massive political suppression, most of the time the local groups were not in contact with one another, nor with the central committee in Belgrade. In 1938 Josip Broz-Tito wrote in a letter to the leader of the Comintern Georgi Dimitrov:

“Meanwhile there are party organizations in all provinces of Yugoslavia, which are associated with the leadership. Only in Macedonia this matter is not regulated, although there are local groups. However, these groups are not connected with each other nor with a provincial committee. The conditions there are quite good, but there is no leading cadre from Macedonia itself. It is necessary to regulate this matter as soon as possible.”¹²

The Socialist Workers Party of Yugoslavia (Communists), founded in April 1919 and only one year later renamed in Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), had to act illegally since 1921. The various efforts to build up legal parallel organizations, such as the Independent Workers Party of Yugoslavia from 1922–1924 or the United Workers Party in the 1930s, remained without a notable success. Like the new Yugoslav state, which joined territories and peoples with separate identities and social orders, and whose commitment to the common state and some common identity varied, the party was an alliance of pre-unification socialist parties and left-wing cultural clubs that had different political legacies and different national consciousnesses. With the founding of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the various socialist groups in Macedonia were united in a single party for the first time in their history. The leading force of the party-building process was the group in Skopje, where in February 1919 Dušan Cekić had formed a provisional founding committee. In the first years the leading persons of the regional party organization – Dušan Cekić, Milan Marković, Petar Djordjević, Kosta Stefanović, Kosta Novaković and Dragutin Tasić – were either former members of the social democratic group in Skopje or people from old Serbia.¹³ On the other hand, in cities like Veles, Prilep or Štip, Panko Brašnarov, Nikola Cukarov, or the brothers Todor and Dimče Zografski started their political career on the left wing of the Ottoman IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) or in Bulgarian socialist groups before joining the ranks of the communist movement, while Ferid Bajram first was a member of the Young Turk movement and later on one of the founders of the social democratic group in Skopje.

In the years immediately following World War II, little thought was given to the national question by the Yugoslav communists in general or the Macedonian communists in particular. No resolution was passed on this subject at the first two congresses of the party, and the national problem was not an issue in any of the factional struggles of this period. The communists vigorously supported the principle of centralism and the formation of a unitary state.¹⁴ The Macedonian communists tried to avoid any contact with the Bulgaria-based

12 Quoted in Nadežda Cvetkovska: *Gragjanskite partii vo Vardarskiot del na Makedonija (1935–1941)*, Skopje 1996, p. 90.

13 See Shoup, p. 30, note 40.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 19

IMRO and fought them as well as the government in Belgrade.¹⁵ “For us this [the Macedonian Question] does not exist”, wrote the party newspaper “Socialistička zora”, printed in Serbian and Turkish, in March, 1920. “We do not care about his [the Macedonian’s] religious or national conviction. Most important is that he believes in the class struggle.”¹⁶

The absence of any national policy in this period is not as amazing as it seems. The great bulk of the not so young founding members of the party, like the leadership of the CPY in Belgrade around Simar Marković, received their decisive political socialization in pre-war social democracy. In contrast to the social base of the communist parties in industrialized countries like Germany or France, the membership of the party in the southern parts of Yugoslavia was quite similar to the early labour movement in Western Europe or in most parts of Eastern Europe. In the beginning of the 1920s the party was composed of craftsmen, the workers of small enterprises, teachers, lower officials and civil servants.¹⁷ Significant is the high number of shoemakers, who played an important role in the pre-industrialized labour movement, but who completely lost their leading position in the British labour party and in the communist parties of Germany and France. Only in Eastern Europe did shoemakers continue to have some importance in the rank and file of communist parties.¹⁸ And although there were some former IMRO members in prominent positions in the party of this period, the social composition was unlike that of the Ottoman national revolutionary movement.¹⁹ The party members maintained some attitudes of the previous period, which differ for example from that of the Russian Bolsheviks. They were not professional revolutionaries of the Leninist type. And

- 15 See Todor G. Zografski/Dimče A. Zografski: KPJ i VMRO (obedineta) vo Vardaska Makedonija vo periodot 1920–1930, Skopje 1974. p 98.
- 16 Quoted in Ivan Katardižev: *Kommunističkoto dviženje vo Makedonija i dejnosta na KPJ do Obznanata*, in: *Istorija (Skopje)*, 5 (1969), no. 2, pp. 3–20, here p. 14.
- 17 Because of lack of interest, there are still no statistics or articles about the social composition of the party in Macedonia. A useful substitute is the book of the brothers Todor and Dimče Zografski (note 15), where a very large part of the party membership in Skopje, Veles and Štip is mentioned by name and profession.
- 18 The most prominent example of a radical shoemaker in Eastern Europe is the former Rumanian president Nicolae Ceaușescu. See Eric J. Hobsbawm/Joan W. Scott: *Der Schuhmacher als Politiker*, in: Eric J. Hobsbawm: *Ungewöhnliche Menschen. Über Widerstand, Rebellion und Jazz*, München 2001, pp. 31–63.
- 19 On the social structure of the IMRO membership, see the study by Jutta De Jong: *Der nationale Kern des makedonischen Problems. Ansätze und Grundlagen einer makedonischen Nationalbewegung (1890–1903). Ein Beitrag zur komparativen Nationalismusforschung*, Frankfurt a.M./Bern 1980. The membership of some former followers of the left wing of the IMRO such as Panko Brašnarov is of some importance to the belief of Macedonian historians regarding the predominantly national character of Macedonian communism. But the case of Panko Brašnarov, who left IMRO after the revolution of the Young Turks, is not as significant as it seems if one isolates the Macedonian affair. In most parts of Europe the labour movement started as the left wing of the national movement, but no one treats the leading members of the other national labour organizations such as the German Social Democrat August Bebel because of his national orientation. And in the Macedonian case a person like Ferid Bajram, the deputy mayor of “red Skopje” in 1920, is not called a Turkish nationalist, who linked himself with communism only for tactical reasons, although he was a former member of the Young Turk movement.

compared to Lenin, they held a more orthodox stand on the national question. They followed the traditional Marxist position that national consciousness and nation-states were secondary and even diverted from the class struggle, although national feeling was in evidence in the rank and file of the party from time to time.

According to the social democrats, nation-states were the natural organizational unit for a capitalist economy. Simar Marković stated that the national question in Slovenia and Croatia was a “constitutional question”, while the problems in Macedonia were caused by the rivalry of the Balkan states. He argued that nationalism originated with the bourgeoisie and that the reconciliation of national conflicts should be sought within a capitalist framework. There is no evidence that this position was not shared by most of the Macedonian communists. So it is not surprising that Panko Brašnarov defended the defeatist policy in the national question of those days at a conference with veterans of the communist movement in 1948:

“Concerning the national question there was nothing else than equal rights. We expected the revolution to come the next day. In Germany there was unrest, everywhere there was unrest, in Bulgaria too, and we expected that tomorrow will bring the revolution that would solve the national question.”²⁰

And forty years later Bogojta Fotev, a young communist peasant and never associated with any Macedonian national activity or organization, told the student newspaper *Mlad borec* the same story in 1989:

“We looked for change, even the party was legal. These were the times after the October revolution when the whole world was seized by a wave of revolution. In those days nobody posed a national question, because we lived in anticipation that communism will extend to the whole world. This really should become a great matter. This feeling lasted until the *obznana* [the prohibition of the party]”.²¹

20 Zapisnik od Konferencijata na starite pretstvanici na socialističkoto dviženje vo Makedonija so drugaror pretsedatel na vladata na NRM Lazar Koliševski, 2.11.1948, Arhiv na Institutot za Naticonalna Istorija, Fond Sekavanja, Kutia XXXVIII/22, br. 103.

21 Siniša Stanković: “Bogojta Fotev: Ne bev jas za tie raboti”. Intervju so Bogojta Fotev, in: *Mlad Borec* br. 1660, 22.03.1989, pp 9–11, here p. 10. Bogojta Fotev never had any contact with a Macedonian nationalist organization, although he could have had the possibility while in the United States of America from 1924 to 1926. Unlike in Yugoslavia such organizations were not prohibited and many existed among the Bulgarian and Macedonian migrant workers, not only among those associated with the VMRO, but also more leftist circles. He was more interested in the work of the communist party of the USA and the literature and culture of the Soviet Union. See Koška-Krstevski, pp. 77–82. After his death in 1992 the furnishings of his house in Bistrica remained unaltered and were converted into a kind of museum. The walls are covered by posters of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Che Guevara, but none of Tito or a Macedonian hero of the past. His library includes Marxist literature, the Stalin biography by Isaac Deutscher, and so on, but nothing treating Macedonian affairs.

The Conflict between the Yugoslav Communist Party, the Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union and the Comintern

Although there was no public criticism of the Yugoslav Party's national policy until May 1922, it was clear from its inception that the Comintern had a view of the national question quite contrary to the position of the Yugoslav communists. The Soviet Union was interested in encouraging national rivalries in the Balkans against the anti-sovietic system of Versailles and in 1922 forced the party to reconsider its attitude towards the national problem. This new policy, marked by the attempts of Comintern functionaries and Soviet agents to reach an agreement with the Croatian Peasant Party and the Bulgaria-based IMRO in 1924, was openly and vigorously propagated at meetings of an offshoot of the Comintern, the "Balkan Communist Federation", which was under the influence of the Bulgarian communists and was openly hostile towards Yugoslavia.²² When the Yugoslav Party came under Russian pressure, it was already in a confused state due to the total ban of all legal party activities in August 1921. New splits occurred in 1921 over whether the party should seek concessions from the government to restore its legality. Supported by the Comintern and Stalin, a "left faction" attacked the leading circles around Simar Marković and outvoted them finally in 1926. As a consequence of this pressure from outside and within the party, the Yugoslavs were forced to adopt the Comintern's Macedonian line, originally strongly opposed by the party. At the third party conference in December 1923 in Belgrade, a resolution called upon the Macedonian peasants to lead a struggle for the "establishment of worker-peasant rule in an independent Macedonia which will voluntarily enter the federation of independent Balkan republics."

One of the fruits of Soviet Balkan policy was the foundation of a national-revolutionary front organization of the Comintern in October 1925, the "united IMRO". Although this organization was "little more than a group of conspirators who frequented Viennese coffee houses", as R. Burks has remarked, in Macedonian historiography it attracted more and more attention since the 1970s.²³ For the Comintern, the united IMRO was at best the second option. It was founded by Dimitar Vlahov, who at the same time joined the ranks of the Bulgarian Workers Party (Communists), and some less important followers of the left wing of the Macedonian movement, when the Soviet Balkan emissaries failed to establish a political alliance with the right wing IMRO a year earlier.²⁴ It hardly needs mention that the Macedonian Republic, which the Comintern and the united IMRO recommended, did not have anything in common with the Republic of Macedonia of today, as not only the Macedonian historians want to tell us, but also some authors like Spyridon Sfetas or L.A.D. Dellin. The

22 On the hostile relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia as the most important outpost of French influence and the coincidence of Soviet policy and Bulgarian revisionism, see Shoup, pp. 22–34 and Rothschild, pp. 242–250.

23 Burks, p. 95.

24 On the unsuccessful Soviet attempts to reach an agreement with the IMRO see Stefan Troebst: *Mussolini, Makedonien und die Mächte 1922–1930. Die "Innere Makedonische Revolutionäre Organisation" in der Südosteuropapolitik des faschistischen Italien*, Köln/Wien 1987, p. 100; Barker, pp. 40–42; Rothschild, pp. 182–190; Dimitar Vlahov: *Memoari*, Skopje 1970, pp. 211–248.

Macedonian Republic should not free a Macedonian nation, but a hodgepodge of nationalities, while the Slav majority was still treated as Bulgarians by both organizations.

What is more important is that the united IMRO had rather distinct relations with the three communist parties in the geographical space the organization was dealing with. The Yugoslav Party and the Macedonian communists had vigorously rejected the attempts of the Comintern to be engaged in negotiations with the IMRO. And in the internal party quarrels the Croatian communist Ante Ciliga, the most decisive opponent of the Yugoslav Central Committee, was not able to gain support in Macedonia for his opinion that the IMRO, although a fascist force in Bulgaria, was a national-revolutionary one in Yugoslavia.²⁵ During the entire period of existence of the united IMRO, from 1925 to its dissolution by the Comintern in 1935, the Macedonian membership of the Yugoslav Party could not reach a common position on the question of how to deal with this organization. The recommendations of the leadership of the united IMRO to look for national-revolutionary groups as allies were received with suspicion.²⁶ Many Macedonian communists could not agree to build up a second communist organization, fearing that such an organization would undermine the principles of "democratic centralism".²⁷ But also the members of the old Ottoman IMRO like Panko Brašnarov and Rizo Rizov, who were acting in accordance with the new political line, were not involved in the founding process of the united IMRO. They were simply appointed by the leadership of that organization in Vienna as Yugoslav representatives and never took any initiative, but simply executed a policy planned elsewhere and authorized by the Comintern. Far from a split between the local party cells and the central committee in Belgrade, the provincial organization was divided on the question of the united IMRO. Of the two delegates from Macedonia at the third congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in Vienna in 1926, one favoured and the other rejected this policy.²⁸

The Yugoslav Party could hardly agree with the attitude of the Comintern to treat the Macedonian Question as a Balkan question and not as a problem of Yugoslav domestic politics, although they were forced to accept this approach. Faced with the national conflicts in the country, the party was prepared to distance itself from the rigid centralism and to make some concession in the national question. Attacking the Yugoslav regime for perpetuating the Serbian domination of the country, the provincial organization was engaged in the "fight for the fundamental cultural and national rights of the Macedonian people". But in the long run, the party did not accept any solution of the Macedonian question outside the framework of the Yugoslav state. With Kosta Novaković's pamphlet "Macedonia to the Macedonians and the land to the people who cultivate it", published in 1924, an attempt was made to maintain the party's authority in the Macedonian question, while at the same time making concessions to Comintern policy.

25 Zografski, p. 98f.

26 The central committee of the united IMRO was based first in Vienna, then in Berlin and finally in Paris.

27 See Zografski, pp. 138–143.

28 See *ibid.*, p. 154.

Although the united IMRO was not in fact as independent of the Comintern as it wanted to demonstrate in public, the Bulgarian section was not a simple communist organization. The members were mainly left wing national-revolutionaries with only loose ties with the communist movement. Dimitar Vlahov, for example, was more a socialist like the Jewish Zionist leader Ben Gurion than a true communist. On the other hand, the Yugoslav section was founded entirely by party members. "In the first place we were members of the CPY", Todor and Dimče Zografski wrote in their memoirs.²⁹ The united IMRO was treated as a normal section of the party like the youth organization, which provoked a lot of criticism by the united IMRO leadership.³⁰ The political persecution by the Yugoslav police, the weak contacts with the leadership in Berlin, and the political confusion in the Macedonian provincial organization were the main reasons why the united IMRO was so short-lived in Yugoslavia. The initial membership of 200–250 dropped fast to about 80 members. In 1929 the contact with Berlin was lost and only a few months later the organization was practically dissolved in Yugoslavia, when at the same time nearly all party cells in Macedonia were arrested by the police. Due to lack of interest the organization was not reorganized when the political conditions for communists became better.

The Student Movement in Belgrade and the Generation Conflict within the Party

The establishment of the royal dictatorship on January 6, 1929, had decisive consequences for the development of the Communist Party in all of Yugoslavia. The massive repression which followed the coup d'état in the name of a Yugoslav unitarism while still following the priority of the Serbian national interest in the common state was not only directed against those groups engaged in the struggle for more rights for their ethnic or national groups; the communists themselves were now persecuted in a hitherto unknown way. But on the other hand, a widespread generation conflict in the society deepened in the 1930s and brought a new wave of members into the party. A significant part of the younger generation saw communism and Yugoslavism as an effective bridge to surmount the deep gaps threatening society. In addition, the Spanish Civil War and the party's conspiratorial activities appealed to members of the frustrated middle class youth, as well as to some young workers, but mainly to students. In Macedonia this turn towards communism and Yugoslavism was forced by the government's new education policy. When the royal dictatorship was established in 1929, the minister for education, Božidar Maksimović, decided to close all senior classes of the grammar schools in Macedonia with the exception of two schools in Skopje and one in Bitola. In this way most students were forced to finish their education in a handful of boarding schools in Serbia. One of the first who was affected by this measures was the first president of independent Macedonia after 1992, Kiro Gligorov, who had to leave his place of

29 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 255.

birth, Štip, in order to finish his schooling in Skopje. In his memoirs he wrote that this was a decisive factor in the development of his Macedonian national consciousness.³¹

It was mainly these children of the middle classes of the provincial cities of Macedonia, such as Prilep, Bitola, Tetovo or Štip, who were attracted to the Communist Party in Macedonia in the 1930s. The conflict about education had a special national momentum in Macedonia. While for the population of Skopje the Serbian language had the image of being a “modern” or “sophisticated” language, the young communists demanded what they called “the Macedonian language” to become the language of school education.³² In some oppositional student circles such as the MMRO (Macedonian Revolutionary Youth Organization, founded in 1931 in Skopje, among others by Kiro Gligorov), they had close contact to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which tried to integrate the different regional feelings in a new Yugoslav patriotism. The importance of this generation of new party members for developments in the post-World War II era is described by a communist of the older generation, Bogoja Fotev:

“... I can not agree with our young historians, who talk about a Macedonian individuality before the war. This is not true, it is difficult for people to develop without nation, church, without permission for a literary culture. We Macedonians were treated as a geographical notion. Kiro Milenov, a student, first talked about a Macedonian nationality. He did it when he was on trial.”³³

In the light of developments after World War II, when nationalism more and more replaced communism as the leading ideology of the political system, one could be led to believe that this group of young communists was moved primarily by national feelings and that they were the core of a growing national movement. But stressing the national moment was part of general CPY policy since the middle of the 1930s, following the new Comintern policy of a popular front orientation. Their Macedonian nationalism was, in the first place, a vehicle to participate in power in Yugoslavia. In order to build up a united front with various middle class parties of the different national groups, the communists tried to present themselves as the leading force in defending national interests. In this context the emphasis on the rebellious past of the different Yugoslav nations was seen as a resource for revolution. The recognition of a Macedonian nation should protect the integrity of the Yugoslav state. With the concept of a Macedonian nation, the Macedonian case was no longer treated as a Balkan problem, but as a Yugoslav domestic affair. At the Fourth National Conference of the party in December 1934, reference to a separate Macedonian nationality was made for the first time.³⁴ Although up to 1935 the party officially demanded the right of self-determination of peoples and the anti-colonial struggle of “oppressed nations” to break up Yugoslavia in favour of “workers’ and peasants’ states” in accordance with the official Comintern policy, a pro-Yugoslav feeling

31 Kiro Gligorov: *Makedonija e sè što imame*, Skopje 2001, p. 24.

32 See Adži Mitreski, p. 35.

33 Bogoja Fotev, in: Stanković, p. 9.

34 See Shoup, p. 40.

prevailed in the new generation. “Having grown up and fought during the dictatorship with people from all parts of the country, we accept the party’s anti-Yugoslav position as a matter of party-discipline rather than of conviction”, commented Milovan Djilas forty years later on his position in those times.³⁵ The programme of the MMRO of 1932 avoided any kind of demand for secession, but called for equal rights for Macedonians in a federatively organized Yugoslavia.³⁶ And the poet Kočo Racin, the functionary who organized the absorption of the MMRO into the Communist Party in 1933 and a critic of the old Marković-leadership of the 1920s, continued to warn the MMRO members not to fall into the trap of nationalism and thereby isolate the Macedonian problem from the common struggle of the Yugoslav nations. In particular, he tried to keep them away from the influence of the united IMRO, which still existed outside Yugoslavia.³⁷

It should not be forgotten that the party in those days was not only composed of Macedonians, but was as multinational as the population of the region. Besides the Macedonians there were Serbs, Montenegrins, Aroumanians, Jews, not to forget the group of young Turkish communists especially in Skopje.³⁸ The politics of cultural stagnation, practiced by the government towards the Albanians, excluded the second biggest Muslim minority from the educational system and resulted in a significant lack of Albanian communists. But the government’s policy did not work in the case of the much more urbanized Turks, the largest Muslim minority at that time in Macedonia.³⁹ The religious schools, like the great medresa “King Aleksandar” in Skopje, which the government favoured as places of education for the Muslims, developed into a theatre of a generation conflict where the accusation of conservatism of the older generation was combined with a communist critique of the Yugoslav re-

35 Djilas, p. 133.

36 See Adži Mitrevski, pp. 25–43.

37 See *ibid.*, p. 30 and 37. Although Kočo Racin was not one of the new members of the young generation in a narrow sense – he was a Macedonian delegate at the fourth congress of the CPY in 1928 in Dresden –, he developed positions quite similar to theirs.

38 For the following see Mihajlo Grbeski: Kemal Sejfula-Orak, Skopje 2000, pp. 1–48.

39 As in Ottoman times, during the inter-war period the terms “Turks” and “Albanians” were not fully developed as ethnic or national categories. They described the social border between the urban and rural population and the culture of the common “Muslim miller”, independent of ethnic background. In this way an Albanian or Slavic Muslim peasant became a Turk when he left the countryside, settled in the city and was integrated into the culture, the behaviour and the social order of the Muslim city population. The *lingua franca* of the Muslim population in the city was Turkish. While in Tetovo the Albanian nation-building process was much more developed, the overwhelming majority of the Muslims in Skopje spoke Turkish and considered themselves Turks and this not in a national sense. See Burcu Akan Ellis: *Shadow Genealogies: Memory and Identity Among Urban Muslims in Macedonia*, Boulder, Colorado, USA, 2003. The social division of the Muslim population, which influenced the nation-building process of Turks and Albanians in Yugoslavia, could furnish one explanation, why Turks were much more attracted to communism than Albanians. The revolutionary and sometimes non- or anti-religious traditions of the “Young Turks” as a possible bridge to communism was alien to the developing Albanian nation in Yugoslavia, which was influenced by the more conservative and religious stratum of the Muslim society. In addition, most of the Albanian communists, such as the brothers Kemal and Nedjat Agoli from the border town Debar, got their political socialization while studying in Albania and were not integrated in the Yugoslav communist network.

gime.⁴⁰ The Turkish student organization *Yardım* (Assistance) was acting as a communist front organization as was the case with the Macedonian ones. The central vakuf library in Skopje was at the same time a meeting place of Turkish communists, because its leader was a member of the oppositional Democrat Party and an ally of the communists.

Contrary to what is suggested by nearly every anthology about distinguished Macedonian communists, these figures were in their youth hardly inspired by the “heroic tradition of the anti-Ottoman *Ilinden* uprising of 1903”, in fact, their knowledge of the Macedonian past was absolutely limited. It was not until 1980 that a freelance historian informed Ljupčo Arsov, a communist leader of the post-war era, that his grandfather had been an IMRO chief during the Ottoman period. In his memoirs Arsov wrote:

“We students, the majority of course, felt that we were neither Bulgarians nor Serbs but Macedonians, but we were not able in those times to show clearly and supported by documents the historical process of the development of the Macedonian nation. All the documents and materials were unknown to us. We did not have the documents at our disposal with which we could have shown its development and how the battle of the Macedonian people was fought not only against the Ottoman Empire and Turkish slavery, but also against all kind of foreign propaganda organized by the bourgeois states of the Balkans – Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia – over decades, to show that we should be Bulgarians, Greeks or Serbs. In those times we knew very little about the fight for our native language, for national liberty, and for our own statehood. And even *Ilinden* we were not yet able to view in the true light. The narration about all of that at home was not satisfactory to me. On the other hand, in school they tried to isolate us as much as possible from the people of the village. In all possible respects they wanted to drum it into us that we had always been Serbs.”⁴¹

In Prilep, the city where the new generation first succeeded in ruling the party, the library of the communist cell was full of Marxist literature and Russian authors, books that communists read all over the world. But there was only one title on Macedonian affairs, the pamphlet of the Serbian communist Kosta Novaković.⁴² Even today the language Dimče Adži Mitrevski, founder of the MMRO and member of the party, loves most is not, as one would expect in the case of a Macedonian nationalist, the Macedonian language but Esperanto, the artificial international language, popular within the labour movement of the period.⁴³ About the widespread lack of information on Macedonian history he wrote: “But indeed, we were more conscious of the social aspect of this struggle, thanks to the rich Marxist literature available and because of the connections and contacts, which we had with the older communist

40 While the religious authorities and the medrese in Tetovo were strictly oppositional and anti-Yugoslav, in Skopje they were loyal to the regime. See *ibid.*

41 Ljupčo Arsov: *Svedočstva*, Skopje 1984, p. 37.

42 See Vera Vesković-Vangeli: *Borbata za nezavisna Makedonska Republika od Ilinden do ASNOM*, Skopje 1995, p. 236, note 10.

43 See the preface in: Adži Mitrevski, p. 7.

comrades.”⁴⁴ And it should not be forgotten, although focusing on the national question in the history of Macedonia tends to do this, that the Macedonian cause was only one of many questions they dealt with. There were many other matters, such as the Spanish Civil War or the international situation and the danger of war, which attracted their attention.

How instrumental the national policy was still being treated by these young communists and to what extent it was being subordinated to the communist view of class are demonstrated in the memoirs of Strahil Gigov, a young communist worker from the central Macedonian city Veles and a leading party functionary at the end of the 1930s as well as after World War II. Gigov, together with twenty other Macedonian communists, was imprisoned from 1935 to December 1937, in Sremska Mitrovica in the central Yugoslav prison together with more than 150 communist prisoners from all over Yugoslavia. They transformed the prison into a “university” of communism. Although Gigov agreed with the national policy of the CPY, he had some problems with the organization of party groups along national lines in the prison.⁴⁵

“More and more we started to act and to assert ourselves as a Macedonian group in prison. To a certain extent we copied the Slovenians, who lived in their own nearly closed group. I did not like this kind of arrangement on the base of nationality, and more and more I fought against it. Indeed, I felt as a Macedonian and I knew there was nothing bad in this, but I thought that we communists in prison should be united on the basis of class and that this feeling should dominate all others.”⁴⁶

It required long discussions with Ognjen Prica, a Croatian communist and one of the leading ideological figures in Sremska Mitrovica and the main organizer of the communist prison university, to convince Gigov that the new principles of organization did not undermine the priority of the class interest.

The wave of new young communists joining the party in Macedonia was only part of a common Yugoslav development. Especially in the less developed southern parts of Yugoslavia, many young people tried to come in contact with the party. Among the growing number of students from all over Yugoslavia who studied in Belgrade and Zagreb a communist orientation was visible, while relatively few students from Serbia itself participated in the movement. In the first years after the coup d'état, they acted independently of the party and tried to become acquainted with the various communist factions and groups inside and outside the disorganized CPY, the central committee of which was in exile in France since 1929. The autonomy of the universities granted students freedom and rights to an extent not found elsewhere in society. The autonomy enjoyed by the universities was one of the rare possibilities for the Communist Party to act on a semi-legal level and to recruit new members more or less openly. The hard core of the student self-administration in some faculties, such as the faculty

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

45 In this respect Gigov's position was quite similar to that of Lenin in his struggle with the Jewish “Bund”.

46 Strahil Gigov: *Sećavanja*, Skopje 1975, p. 102.

of law, was totally controlled by communists.⁴⁷ About five hundred students from Macedonia studied in Belgrade in the 1930s and another 60–70 in Zagreb, an important part of them being sympathizers or followers of the Communist Party. Acting this way first outside Macedonia, their influence became slowly noticeable in Macedonia by 1936.

Society, but also the CPY, was faced with a generation conflict. The memoirs of prominent partisan leaders from Montenegro, Milovan Djilas and Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, are full of accusations against the older generation of communists as “coffee house chatterboxes without revolutionary discipline” or “craftsmen communists”.⁴⁸ In the Macedonian case the same attitude can be found in the memoirs of Strahil Gigov or, from another perspective, in the biography about Bogoja Fotev, a victim of the Cominform conflict.⁴⁹ Compared to the older generation they were professional revolutionaries, who subordinated their whole life to the instructions of the party and were bound together by revolutionary discipline. To be imprisoned was no longer seen as an individual tragedy and a disaster for the party organization, but as a new field of activity and a test of the revolutionary stand and behaviour. Without any personal experience of the social democratic past of Marxism, they accepted the authority of the Soviet Union and of Stalin. The internal party purges and the fight against “Trotskyist elements” within the party was not only seen as an effective means to strengthen the party and to end the notorious factional fights, but also as a confirmation of their own vanguard behaviour. They owed their success within the party to the increasing attempts of the Comintern since the middle of the 1930s to accelerate the process of Bolshevization, which was belated compared to the other Balkan parties, but which coincided with their own conviction as to how the party should work. Thanks to the strong concentration of communist students in the capital and because of the alliance they entered with the Croatian metal worker Josip Broz-Tito in the central committee while in exile, they took over the organization of the party in the city of Belgrade in 1937. Controlling this key organization, the so-called “Belgrade sectarians” around Milovan Djilas and Aleksandar Ranković were able to assign more and more persons with a similar background to key positions in the CPY, while the organization was restructured along Stalinist principles. Upon his arrival in Yugoslavia, Tito, together with Djilas, Ranković, the Montenegrin Ivan Milutinović, the Slovenian Miha Marinko and others, had the majority in the new central committee and the Politburo.

47 On the Yugoslav student movement in the 1930s in general see Milica Damjanović: *Napredni Pokret studenata beogradskog univerziteta. Knjiga vtora od 1930. do 1941. godine*, Belgrade 1974. On the Macedonian case in particular see Aleksandar Apostolov: *Od aktivnosti na naprednite studenti na belgradskiot univerzitet vo 1936 godina (Nekolku neobjaveni dokumenti)*, in: *Istrojja*, 12 (1976) no. 1–2, pp. 28–63; Lazar Sokolov: *Prilog za Makedonskoto studentsko dviženje vo Zagreb*, in: *Ibid.*, pp. 1–27; Vladimir Kratov, *Kon revolucionernata dejnost na Josif Josifovski vo progresivnoto studentsko dviženje na belgradskiot univerzitet (1934–1936)*, in: *Glasnik*, 27 (1984) no. 1–2, pp. 173–190.

48 See Djilas; Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo: *Mein Weg mit Tito. Ein Revolutionär erinnert sich*, München/Zürich 1972, pp. 39, 60–79.

49 See Gigov (note 45), pp. 44–45; Krstevski-Koška, p. 101.

As in other regions such as Montenegro and Bosnia the success of the Belgrade students too needed more time, because many of them were only temporarily present in Macedonia. While most of the recently organized party cells were still under the influence of what the Belgrade students called "social democrat craftsmen communists"⁵⁰, in some places such as Prilep they were rather successful in the attempt to bring the party under their control. When a new central committee was founded with Tito at the top and people like Djilas and Ranković in the majority, it promoted young members in the provincial organization who were deeply loyal to the new leadership. In the summer of 1939, Djilas created a new provincial committee to lead the party in Macedonia. Tito himself appealed to the Comintern for support of the still weak organization in Macedonia. But by the time the emissary of the Comintern, Metodija Šatorov-Šarlo, arrived in Macedonia and became the party secretary of the temporary regional committee in 1939, international constellation had changed again.⁵¹ With the German-Soviet pact of August, 1939, the CPY was forced to treat the coming war as an imperialistic one, in which communists should not support either side. Although many party members, irrespective of their nationality, refused to dissociate themselves from the patriotic line developed during the popular front period, the new situation was conducive to the strengthening of old anti-Yugoslav factions within the party. This was true not only in the case of Metodija Šatorov-Šarlo in Macedonia, but also in Montenegro and Kosovo, where old followers of the faction of Petko Miletić now came to dominate the party.⁵²

The German-Soviet pact caused Šatorov, who shared Stalin's old view of the national question to be a peasant question, to nurture the illusion that Soviet policy was again favouring a solution of the Macedonian question in favour of Bulgaria. At the Fifth Party Conference in 1940 he clashed with the leadership over the question of the Serb colonists in Macedonia. In his opinion, the national question in Macedonia was primarily a question of land, emerged due to a class division within Macedonian territory along national lines. He accused the official party line, which, under the influence of Croatian communists, had adopted a federal solution for the Yugoslav problem and favoured nationally defined territorial units as

50 When the Montenegrin Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo was in Macedonia in 1940 on behalf of the central committee, he was rather surprised to see that the party in Bitola was controlled by shoemakers and tailors. See Vukmanović-Tempo, p. 74.

51 Metodija Šatorov-Šarlo was born in Prilep in Yugoslav Macedonia, but he was never politically active in Yugoslavia before. He was a Comintern functionary for several years in Paris and a member of the Bulgarian Workers Party (communists) as well as of the united IMRO. In the official Macedonian historiography in socialist times, he was treated as a "traitor" of the Macedonian nation, because of his defeatist role during the Second World War, when he refused to accept the party line of a peasant-based armed uprising against the Bulgarian and Italian occupiers. Instead, he preferred illegal work in the cities. He wanted to take the regional organization out of the framework of the Yugoslav party and connect it to the Bulgarian party. Nowadays there are some people who want to rehabilitate him as a "true Macedonian nationalist". See, for example, the book by the hobby historian from Prilep: Riste Bunteški-Bunte: Metodija Šatorov Šarlo. Politički stavovi, Prilep 1996.

52 On the strong influence of Petko Miletić's faction in Montenegro and Kosovo see Shoup, p. 51.

the basic units of a Yugoslav state as sectarianism, indeed Trotskyism.⁵³ But he was ignoring the fact that the Yugoslav and Soviet governments were engaged at that time in negotiations which ultimately led to Yugoslav recognition of the Soviet Union in the spring of 1940. And after the defeat of France in 1940, the CPY abandoned its appeasement policy and adopted a more patriotic pro-Yugoslav line again. With the provincial organization still not under full control, Šatorov's presence in Macedonia confused the communist students; he remained an alien element among them, but was equipped with the authority of the Comintern.⁵⁴ In the long run, the positions both sides represented were incompatible. Apart from the weakness of the party, which had only 250–300 members in Macedonia in 1940, the international situation and the activities of Šatorov were the chief reasons why the communist students were able to bring the party completely under their control only in 1942.

The Comintern and the (Yugoslav) Macedonian Question in the 1930s

The new Macedonian line of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia since the early 1930s found confirmation in the reversal of the official Balkan policy of the Comintern. Under the leadership of the Polish communist Henrik Wałęcki, the newly elected Balkan secretariat of this organization discussed in the autumn of 1933 also matters related to Macedonia, the question of a Macedonian nation figuring as the central theme.⁵⁵ Only a few months later, the Executive Committee of the Comintern called upon the Balkan secretariat to prepare a resolution on the Macedonian Question. In April, 1934, this resolution, drawn up jointly by Wałęcki, Vlahov and others, was published in the newspaper of the united IMRO, "Makedonsko delo", under the headline "The Situation in Macedonia and the Tasks of the IMRO (united). A Resolution of the CC of the IMRO (united)", which later on was reprinted in various other Comintern publications in various languages. It was the first document of the Comintern in which a separate Macedonian nation was mentioned and the suppression of the Macedonian language was criticized. It was also the first time that Bulgarian rule in the eastern part of the geographic Macedonia was characterized as national suppression.⁵⁶ Four years later, in 1938,

53 See Susan L. Woodward: *Socialist Unemployment. The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990*, pp. 39–40.

54 On the ambiguous relations of the communist students to Šatorov, see the polemic of Vera Aceva with Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo: *Vera Aceva: Pismo do Tempo*, Skopje 1988. The then 21-year-old housewife from Prilep Vera Aceva was elected in 1940 into the leadership of the provincial committee of the party. Together with her brother, Mirče Acev, a Belgrade student, she was one of the main opponents of Šatorov's defeatist policy concerning partisan warfare in 1941.

55 See Vlahov, pp. 356–358; Torsten Szobries: *Sprachliche Aspekte des nation-building in Mazedonien*, Stuttgart, 1999, pp. 73–74. Wałęcki was assistant chief of the Balkan Secretariat of the Comintern under the Hungarian Béla Kun from 1928–1935. In June 1937 Stalin's police arrested him and he died later in the year.

56 A Macedonian translation of the Bulgarian original of the document was published in: Ivan Katarđiev (ed.): *VMRO. Dokumenti i materiali*, Bd. II, Skopje 1991, p. 227ff.

a Macedonian nation and a separate Macedonian language were referred to in the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia.⁵⁷

The background of this decision were two important developments which strongly influenced the Comintern's policy. The first was the rise to power of the National Socialist Party in Germany including the subsequent changes in international relations. This led to a spectacular reversal of the official policy of the international communist movement between the Sixth and the Seventh Congresses of the Communist International. The tactics of class conflict was abandoned in favour of the popular front policy. Concerning the Balkans, the status quo was no longer questioned but accepted and should become the basis of communist politics. With the recognition of the Macedonian nation the former insistence on the dissolution of Yugoslavia was given up. In various sessions of the Executive Committee of the Comintern during the subsequent period the Yugoslav question was frequently discussed, the nationalist behaviour of the regional organizations in Slovenia and Croatia was criticized and a rigorous Bolshevization of the party demanded.⁵⁸ Seen in this light, the publication mentioned above in the organ of the united IMRO was nothing less than the anticipated funeral speech of that irredentist organization, which followed only one year later with its dissolution by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935. The strong influence of the international situation on the new Macedonian formula can easily be seen in an anonymous letter sent to the Bulgarian communist Vladimir Pop Tomov: "Research on the question of a Macedonian language is especially now of great political importance due to the fascist theories about race and nation."⁵⁹

The second development behind the Comintern recognition of a Macedonian nation was the replacement of internationalism by soviet patriotism in the USSR in the 1930s, while at the same time Stalin's definition of nation became binding on all national sections of the Comintern. The strong influence of Stalin's dogma is clearly perceptible in the essay (published in 1934) of Vasil Ivanovski, a Bulgarian political emigrant in the USSR and a member of both the Bulgarian and the Russian Communist Party: "Why we Macedonians are a Separate Nation".⁶⁰ Vasil Ivanovski tried to define a Macedonian nation in the Stalinist way by attributing great importance to the language question. While the language problem was not of great significance in the previous periods, it became very important since the late 1930s and is still a highly politicized issue in Macedonia.⁶¹

57 See Szobries, p. 76.

58 See Vera Mujebegović/Ubavka Vujošević: Die Kommunistische Partei Jugoslawiens und die Comintern. Dokumente zur "jugoslawischen Frage" 1936, in: Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung 1993, pp. 187–196.

59 Quoted in Szobries, p. 74.

60 The article was first published in December 1934, as a resolution of the Fourth Macedonian People's Congress in America in Bulgarian. The Macedonian translation is published in Katardžiev: Makedonskata nacionalno politička misla, pp. 444–452.

61 Not only in the Macedonian case was the communist movement bent on achieving recognition of new nations in those days. Thus, in 1937 the question of a separate nation of the Azeri Turks was also on the agenda; and a young Viennese communist, Alfred Klahr, published an article about an Austrian nation, separate from the German one, which would check the German revisionism. See Arnold Reisberg:

The theoretical framework invoked when arguing in favour of a Macedonian nation was mainly developed by a small circle of Bulgarian communists, among them Vasil Ivanovski, not by the Yugoslav Macedonians. Only a few years earlier some of them, such as Angel Dinev or Nikola Vapcarov, could be found on the strictly anti-Russian and Bulgarian-nationalist right wing of the inter-war IMRO.⁶² Although the Bulgarian communists had to accept the new line of the Comintern, the group of pro-Macedonian actors remained an isolated wing of the party, seen with distrust by the leadership and without any significant influence on the Macedonian emigrés in Bulgaria. But in Yugoslav Macedonia the new policy to recognize a new nation fell on fertile ground.

The CPY, the United Opposition of Maček and Macedonia

The special conditions of Yugoslavia permitted the idea of a Macedonian nation to become a success story, first within the Communist Party and, after the war, in the society as well. In the 1930s it was obvious that the communist ideas about the relationship between the peasantry and the national question had lost their relevance and that the communists could not take advantage of the agricultural crisis of the period. With the establishment of the royal dictatorship in Yugoslavia, the cities became the springboard of national conflicts in Macedonia as well as in the other parts of the kingdom. The small middle class, considerably reduced after the Balkan wars, now profited from the attempts of the new government to reconstruct the infrastructure of the region, where nothing had been done over a period of more than ten years. The new self-confidence of the middle class articulated itself in a growing political opposition. But this opposition was quite different from that of the previous period, which was mainly directed by the headquarters of the IMRO in Bulgaria. "Autonomy" or "an independent Macedonia" were now understood as slogans in a struggle for "our rights in a federatively organized Yugoslavia", as Metodija Andonov-Čento, a tradesman from Prilep and a prominent non-communist politician of the early post-World War II era, has mentioned in his memoirs.⁶³

Metodija Andonov-Čento is a good example of the political development of this new middle class. His business profited from railway construction in Macedonia, and he had good

Alfred Klahr – erster marxistisch-leninistischer Theoretiker über die österreichische Nation, in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, 25 (1983), pp. 411–419.

62 On Vapcarov's membership in the IMRO, see: Stojan Risteski: *Golgotata na Gocevata Vnuka Katerina*, Ohrid 1997, p. 32. As a member of the "Brotherhood of Gevglija", Angel Dinev published some books in the late 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, in which he accused Russia of never having supported the Bulgarians in their struggle against the Ottomans, but always the Serbs, Montenegrins and Greeks, Angel Dinev: *Kresnenskoto Vāzstanie prez 1878 god.*, Sofia 1926, p. 4.

63 Quoted in the autobiography of Metodija Andonov-Čento published by his son, Ilja Andonov-Čento: *Mojot Tatko – Metodija Andonov-Čento*, Skopje 1999, p. 63. For a short time after the Second World War, Metodija Andonov-Čento was president of the People's Republic of Macedonia but was arrested by the communists in 1946. He is now a national hero and an icon in Macedonia.

trade relations with Serbia.⁶⁴ He was a member of the Yugoslav unitarist Sokol movement and one of the financiers of the journal "Luč".⁶⁵ This journal, published in various Macedonian dialects, was part of the strategy of the Yugoslav government to make Serbian culture accessible to the local population. At the same time, Andonov-Čento and other leftist politicians such as Kočo Vanov of Veles and Gjorgji Garev of Nikola were candidates on the lists of the united opposition of the Croatian politician Vladimir Maček in the elections of 1935 and 1938, although Maček had no clear position in the Macedonian question and was mainly interested in Croatia. But the discussion about federalism enforced by the united opposition and the weakening of the rigid national unitarism and state centralism during the government of Milan Stojadinović (1935–1939) did much to integrate the opposition in Macedonia in the Yugoslav political system. And in the last year before World War II, the growing fear of Italy's aspirations to territories populated by Albanians was another reason for Macedonians to give up their resistance to a Yugoslav solution of the Macedonian question. This was the background of the communists, attempts to work with the united opposition and later on to outvote them. In this strategy the national question in Macedonia played a decisive role, especially since 1938 when Croatia was given autonomy rights as a result of the agreement (*sporazum*) between the leaders of the coalition parties that formed the Yugoslav government, Cvetković and Maček, while the southern provinces of the kingdom remained untouched by this development.

With the increasing attempts of the students in Belgrade to exercise influence in the south, the Communist Party developed more activities in Macedonia. In historiography these activities are usually treated as coming from the basis of the Communist Party in Macedonia or, in a more nationalist sense, as an important stage of the national rebirth of the Macedonian nation. A good example for this is the Vardar society in Zagreb and Belgrade. The society was founded in the middle of 1935 in Zagreb and, a year later, in Belgrade, by students from Macedonia. In accordance with the law about the autonomy of the universities, the basic unit of the student movement was until then the faculty organization. But as part of the national front policy, the official policy the party adopted at the plenary session in Split in June 1935, the central committee decided to organize the student movement also along regional and national lines.⁶⁶ The Vardar society was only one of them. There were

64 Because of his good trade relations with Serbia, he named his shop in Prilep Šumadija after the central Serb region.

65 About the Yugoslav Sokol see Wolfgang Kessler: *Der Sokol in den jugoslawischen Gebieten (1863–1941)*, in: D. Blecking (ed.): *Die slawische Sokolbewegung. Beiträge zur Geschichte von Sport und Nationalismus in Osteuropa*, Dortmund 1991, pp. 198–218.

66 On the advice of the central committee in Belgrade to the Macedonian students to build up a Macedonian student committee, see *Izjava za dejnosta na studenskata združenie "Vardar" vo belgradskiot univerzitet*, Arhiv na Institutot za Nacionalna Istorija, Fond Sekavanja, Kutia XXXVIII/22, br. 111, p. 1–2; the society Vardar was founded in Zagreb in the autumn 1935 by Macedonian students, who since 1933 were organized in the faculty cells of the youth organization of the CPY. See Sokolov, p. 8. About a typical meeting of the student movement in 1936 in the University of Belgrade, see the report documented by a police agent (predmet: izvешtaj sa mitinga studenata za mir): *Apostolov*, pp. 60–62. Various faculty and national cells of the movement as well as members of the Agrarian Party and the

others for the Montenegrins, the Bosnians and so on. The students in Zagreb and Belgrade organized an appeal to Vladimir Maček demanding the incorporation of Macedonia in the discussion about federalization. In the summer of 1936 communist functionaries and members of Vardar set up a new organization known as MANAPO, the “Macedonian Peoples Movement”, in order to gain influence in the local elections of the same year as a part of the united opposition. In 1937, first in Belgrade and then in Zagreb, the society was banned by the government, because this kind of organization was not seen as in accordance with the law. But the former members of Vardar were still politically active in the other fields of the student movement.

In 1938 a typical conflict arose in Prilep over the parliamentary elections, which demonstrates the involvement of the central committee in party affairs in Macedonia. Many young communists from this town demanded that a prominent communist worker should become the candidate of the united opposition in this election. But Kuzman Josifovski-Pitu, a student from Prilep at the faculty of law in Belgrade and one of the highest-ranking members of the party in Macedonia, intervened and rejected this idea. As a result, the local party cell supported Metodija Andonov-Čento as the joint candidate of the opposition.⁶⁷ It was not Macedonian nationalism that induced Kuzman Josifovski-Pitu to intervene, but the fact that he was much more familiar with the decisions prepared in Belgrade than the ordinary members in Prilep.

In the summer of 1939 the party cell in Veles organized a political demonstration in memory of the last uprising of the Macedonian national-revolutionaries against the Ottomans on August 2, 1903, the orthodox holiday of *Ilinden*. The local cell published a pamphlet in which that uprising was compared to the French Revolution 150 years earlier. One of the authors was Strahil Gigov, who had established contact with Belgrade in 1938. Today, historiography treats that publication as an expression of original Macedonian nationalism.⁶⁸ But the report of a Belgrade student, who worked in the archives of the Institute of National History in Skopje, tells us a different story. According to him the order for this demonstration came from above, from Belgrade. In an attempt to reorganize the party and on behalf of the central committee, Milovan Djilas travelled around Macedonia in the summer of 1939. He told the local cells that the central committee of the party had called upon them to orga-

Democratic Party took part in this meeting. The main topics were the international situation, the war danger, the Spanish civil war, the fight between Marxism and capitalism, etc. Among the prominent communist student functionaries such as Ivo Lolo Ribar, also a Macedonian held a speech, in which he said that apart from the Croatian nation there is also a Macedonian nation in Yugoslavia.

67 Kuzman Josifovski-Pitu was a member of the provincial leadership formed by Milovan Djilas in 1939. In the last two years before the war, he was the person maintaining contact with Belgrade. On the conflict concerning the candidate, see Andonov-Čento, p. 67f.

68 In 1993 the Institute of National History edited a reprint of this pamphlet: Vera Veskoviæ-Vangeli: Francuskata Revolucija i Kruševskiot Manifest 1903, Skopje 1993. Although it was not mentioned then that the originator of that political demonstration was the party cell in Veles, the preface of the reprint suggests it. And this suggestion was well received by other historians, as for example the review by Stefan Troebst in *Südostforschungen* 54 (1995), pp. 390–391, demonstrates. He interprets it as part of an “away-from-Belgrade” atmosphere.

nize demonstrations on the *Ilinden* in order to commemorate the French Revolution.⁶⁹ The positive attitude towards France, which was expressed in the demonstration and in the pamphlet, further underlines the pro- and not anti-Yugoslav intention of the demonstration. While the official Yugoslav policy became estranged from its closest ally France when the kingdom came under the economic influence of the German informal empire, the Yugoslav communists tried to present themselves as the better friends of the French nation and to instrumentalize the traditional pro-French feelings, especially in Serbia.⁷⁰

Another party instructor, the Serb Sreten Žujović, who worked in Macedonia in 1939 and 1940, wrote after the war: "When we came to Macedonia and after strengthening the party, we gave priority to the question of a mass celebration of the Ilinden uprising and uniting the people along the national line."⁷¹

In the spring of 1939, when Czechoslovakia was occupied by Germany, the central committee published a resolution, "The CPY and the Macedonian National Question". Special attention was given to the international situation. The authors wrote that a federal solution for Yugoslavia would be the only protection against the growing fascist influence.⁷² Although Macedonia was one of the main topics of the party conference held in Slovenia at the beginning of June, 1939, no Macedonian representative attended it. The Croatian opposition was strongly criticized for ignoring Macedonia. Macedonia was also important because in less developed parts of the country the government was very successful in destroying the independent trade unions.

The young generation of Macedonian communists under the royal dictatorship paid much more attention to nationalism than the older one. In the long run the communists in Yugoslavia would have been faced with the same contradictions, as the socialists of the Ottoman period.⁷³ But this nationalism should not be overestimated, as is usually done. It was more or less in accordance with developments in world communism in those days and part of the Yugoslav patriotic attitude. The USSR was seen as an example of how to solve the national question wherever a noteworthy national minority existed. But in general they treated the nation functionally in the same way as the communists did in the 1920s.

The new national line was rather successful, especially among the younger generation, but in a certain aspect its followers remained an isolated group. The identification with the Soviet Union and the anti-fascist camp in general was not compatible with the simple logic that the

69 See Izjava za dejnosta na studenskata združenie "Vardar", p. 3.

70 See Djilas, p. 305–306; also the document from 1936 (Izveštaj sa opšteg studenskog zbora održanog 13 o.m. na ovd. univerzitetu) in: Apostolov, pp. 60–62. Not surprisingly, this demonstration planned on the eve of the Hitler Stalin Pact was one of the last manifestations in favour of France.

71 Quoted in Ivan Katardžiev: KPJ, Konsolidacijata na partiskata organizacija vo Makedonija i Makedonskoto nacionalno prašanje neposredno pred vojната 1941 godina, in: Istorija 8 (1972), no. 2, pp. 35–64, here, p. 45.

72 Ibid, pp. 40–44.

73 See Fikret Adamir: The National Question and the Genesis and Development of Socialism in the Ottoman Empire: the Case of Macedonia, in: M. Tunçay/E. J. Zürcher (eds.): Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1923, London/New York/Amsterdam 1994, pp. 27–48.

enemy of my enemy is my friend, which was widespread.⁷⁴ However, this contradiction can be found easily in many cases in the Third World during the inter-war period, where the leadership of a national movement was affected by socialist ideas.⁷⁵ But perhaps more important than the short-term prospects was the fact that with the new anti-fascist policy the party was able to attract a small number of highly committed persons. In the exceptional situation of World War II, they were able to act much more successfully than any other domestic force in the country. And it was especially the aspects that isolated them from the rest of the population that put them in a position to avoid the ethno-centric narrow-mindedness of their environment.

74 See Adži Mitreski, p. 57

75 See Eric Hobsbawm: *Das Zeitalter der Extreme*, München/Wien 1995, p. 211.

