



The Macedonian Referendum and its background

Frederik Haber Sun, 14/04/2019 - 19:16

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At the NATO security conference in Munich, the leaders of the Greek and newly renamed North- Macedonian governments were honoured for 'setting aside' long standing differences over the name of the republic of Macedonia, thereby opening the way for the Balkan republic to eventually enter NATO and the EU. Until recently, Greece had refused to recognise Macedonia for nationalist reasons and had blocked the entry of the country into international alliances wherever it could.

Finally, the Macedonian government and parliament conceded, renaming the country. This 'compromise' was enough for Tsipras to organise a slim majority in the Greek parliament in order to now 'recognise' the renamed neighbouring state, even though it roused a mass reactionary outcry and mobilisation of the Greek right and a governmental crisis which ended with the far right ANEL leaving the Greek government.

The NATO security conference in Munich was clearly one of the few meetings, where both Tsipras and Zaev were 'honoured' for a deal, which will not appease the right and nationalists in either country but, on the other hand, does please the EU and NATO 'and provides them with a small success in a world of increasing tensions, setbacks and conflicts within both institutions.

The referendum of September 2018: A set-back for EU and NATO, but no success for the left either

The renaming of the Macedonian republic has come after a long period of tricks, manoeuvres and negotiations.

On September 30, voters in Macedonia were called to vote on the future name of the Republic. For more than 25 years Greece has prevented Macedonia's access to the EU and NATO by denying its right to call itself 'Macedonia', claiming that only Greece has the right to use this name for the northern part of its territory. So, after the break-up of Yugoslavia, Macedonia was officially recognised as the 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' FYROM. Whilst the whole world accepted the right of the Macedonian population and state to decide on its own name, used officially since the formation of Yugoslavia and to describe the region for centuries, Greek governments refused to do so.

Now, NATO and the EU wanted to take the opportunity of having governments in both Greece and Macedonia willing to make a move in their interests. US-Imperialism and its European 'partners' have the clear ambition to enlarge their influence on the Balkans and to drive back Russian interference. Montenegro, for example, has recently joined NATO. The process of integrating Macedonia into the EU will not happen quickly, given the state of the EU and the economic situation not only of Macedonia but also of Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo, which make up the package of 'EU-Candidates'. Their joining the Union will not make the unsolved problems facing the masters of the EU, that is, German and French imperialism, any easier.

The actual referendum question, however, was not simply about the name of the country. That issue was openly combined with the question of NATO and EU entry:

'Are you in favour of European Union and NATO membership by accepting the agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece?'

By posing the question in this way, the Macedonian government (and the EU and NATO) hoped to win the referendum,

since clearly a substantial section of Macedonian workers and youth hope that joining the EU would mean the right to travel and work and thereby overcome the frontiers and reactionary boundaries set by the European states.

However, it is precisely those hopes which are most likely to be frustrated by a long, perhaps never ending, negotiation process with the EU and its demands to open the Macedonian economy even further to plunder by international capital. Whilst the removal of some territorial claims between the two countries was, in itself, a step forward, the name change clearly was a concession to the unjustified Greek claims against Macedonia. The entry into NATO, however, was clearly the most reactionary aspect of the pact and the referendum, a step that materially advances the Western powers in their new cold war against Russia. Not surprisingly it was this aspect, which was not challenged at all by right wing critics of the treaty in either country.

Despite the government's manoeuvring, however, the referendum did not settle the question. The main opposition party, VMRO-DPMNE, called for a boycott of the referendum and the government's linking of the different issues may also have affected turn out, which was only 36.9 percent. Although 94 percent of those who participated did vote Yes, the result was not binding because turn out was below the 50 percent threshold.

Yet the government under Zaev continued the process. On October 19, Macedonia's parliament voted to start the process of renaming the country the Republic of North Macedonia. A total of 80 deputies in the 120-seat parliament voted in favour of the proposal, just reaching the two-thirds majority needed to enact constitutional changes.

So, EU and US-imperialism have got their way despite the short setback of the referendum. The Zaev-government is continuing the process and risking new nationalist outbreaks by its dubious methods. The same is true for the Syriza-led government in Greece, now facing an even stronger nationalist wave, which could lead to its overthrow.

This means that the only 'left' governments in the Balkan region could be replaced by nationalist bourgeois governments, which will exploit the betrayal of the reformist governments that have not fulfilled the demands and expectations of their voters.

Reformist betrayals

The history of SYRIZA is widely known. Supported by the working-class, the poor and most of the left for its opposition to the austerity measures of the Troika, the party formed a coalition government with the nationalist, rightwing party ANEL and then betrayed its supporters by implementing all the cuts and attacks demanded by the European institutions and the banks.

The social democrat Zaev came to power in Macedonia after a wave of democratic protests led by students against the former government of Grujevski. This movement started in 2015 and grew into mass protests in May, 2016. Recorded phone-calls had shown the high level of corruption and criminal behaviour of the regime. Its undemocratic nature became even clearer when, after losing the next election in December 2016, Grujevski refused to leave office and even had the parliament physically attacked by some party members.

So far the only real improvement from the coalition-government under Zaev was, at last, to give some formal equal rights to the Albanian minority, which makes up about 30 percent of the country's population. Most of the social promises have not been undertaken. Zaev promised very concretely an average wage of 30 000 denar (500 €) and a minimum wage of 16 000 denar (265 €). Two years later the net minimum wage stands at about 12 150 denar. (<https://www.rsm.global/macedonia/en/news/new-increase-minimum-salary-rep...> [1])

So, both SYRIZA and SDSM are in danger of provoking an electoral turn to the right and new nationalist mobilisations by supporting the agenda of the imperialist leaders, by betraying the social demands of their voters, not organising a real fight against the nationalists and opening the door to their demagogy.

Greece and Macedonia: Waves of Nationalism

In January and February 2018, there were new nationalist mass mobilisations in Greece against Macedonia. The central demand, once again, was that the Republic of Macedonia should not have the right to call itself Macedonia. On

February 4, hundreds of thousands flooded the streets of Athens. Estimates varied between 140,000 (police) and 1.5 million according to the organisers. A protest in Thessaloniki, also numbering hundreds of thousands, had taken place a week before.

At the beginning of 2019, the mobilisations re-erupted and were directed against the recognition of the existence even of a 'Northern Macedonia'. They also mobilised hundreds of thousands for a nationalist, reactionary goal.

The Macedonian nationalists took to the streets in March 2018, some 10 000 gathered in Skopje. They opposed all possible concessions by their government in the 'name question', that is to change the constitutional name of 'Republic of Macedonia' by adding even an additional word such as 'new' or 'northern'. The Greek nationalists had demanded exactly the opposite: The word 'Macedonia' should not appear anywhere in the name of their northern neighbour, thus denying even the compromise name of 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' FYROM, under which it has been registered at the UN due to Greek pressure since the 1990s.

The dispute has come up again with the new Macedonian government trying to solve the dispute with the Syriza-led government of Greece in order to overcome the obstacle to joining NATO and EU.

In the Treaty, both governments agreed that Macedonia should be re-named Northern-Macedonia, that certain sentences of the Macedonian constitution should be changed and some of the attempts of the previous Macedonian governments to claim ancient Macedonia for themselves, should be given up. In return, Greece would end its veto of NATO and EU-Entry for Macedonia.

The nationalist demonstrations are alarming sign because they fit into the nationalist demonstrations and reactionary election turn-outs that we have seen in recent years all over Europe.

Greek nationalism

The flare-up of nationalism with the mass-demonstrations in Athens and Thessaloniki in 2018 and 2019 dramatically was in sharp contrast to the years of general-strikes and mass-demonstrations in Greece against austerity and massive cuts, imposed by the EU and orchestrated by German Imperialism, which eventually swept Syriza into government. The betrayals by this reformist misleadership the subsequent decline of mass mobilisation and confidence then led to a defeat of the left movement.

In 2018, officially, no political parties took responsibility for organising the demonstrations, no party flags were flown, just masses of national banners. Of course, in reality, the whole nationalist right was there in Athens, spearheaded by the fascist 'Golden Dawn' party, the Greek Orthodox Church and other reactionaries. Even 'democratic' nationalists marched side by side with them.

The ANEL, ('Independent Greeks'), the bourgeois party which had been in a government coalition with SYRIZA till recently, has its origin in the Nea Dimokratia, ND, and the name-question was one of the main reasons for the split from that party. The leadership of ND had in the past been rather soft on the question. In the 50s, Karamanlis senior had already signed treaties with Yugoslavia that spoke of Macedonia. In 2007, Karamanlis junior would have accepted a name that included 'Macedonia'. Now, under pressure from the right and in trying to make ground against the SYRIZA-led government, ND as the major party of the Greek bourgeoisie also turned to the hard-core nationalist road.

The 'Panhellenic Socialist Movement', PASOK, has its origin in a nationalist bourgeois movement. Whilst it had gained control of most trade-unions, like many populist parties in the semi-colonial world, it always remained a nationalist party. After its catastrophic defeat in 2012, it is now the core of a project to reorganise a social-democratic party. This project is split, as is PASOK itself, over the name question: 'To Potami' has the democratic view that any country can decide on its own name, but the 'Centrist Union' is strictly on the nationalist road. Its leader, Vasilis Leventis, was previously a leader of PASOK. Such 'democrats' and social-democrats openly participated in Athens and before that in Thessaloniki. i

It should be noted that the split from the Greek Communist Party, KKE, which, under the name of Synaspismos, later led the coalition that was to become SYRIZA, was on the nationalist road in 1992, when mass-demonstrations were

also held to pressurise the government not to accept any international recognition of the Republic of Macedonia, which had just emerged from the dissolved Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia?

Now, the leadership of SYRIZA has changed its position. It is trying to solve the 'name-question', but it is doing so by holding secret talks with the new social-democratic government of Macedonia and by advising the media and the police to minimise the nationalist mobilisations. This is not the way to fight nationalists, in fact it puts wind in their sails.

The KKE stands against some nationalist claims of the right and, though it did not participate in the mobilisations, neither did it mobilise against them. Panagiotis Lafazanis, formerly a leader of SYRIZA, now of LAE (People's Unity), does speak out against the nationalist mobilisations. He blames them on NATO and EU, but then he repeats the accusation of the Greek nationalists that the Republic of Macedonia has territorial claims on Greece. So, the struggle to fight nationalism was left to a few left radical groups and some anarchists.

The claims of Greek Nationalism

The central accusation raised by the nationalists in Greece is that, simply by calling their country 'Macedonia', the republic north of the Greek border threatens to split the Greek region 'Macedonia' away and occupy it. This view is widely shared among the population. Many simply deny the right to the republic to call itself with this name, even though Greece accepted the name, 'Socialist Republic of Macedonia' within Yugoslavia, for decades. It also accepted the name FYROM, 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' after the break-up of Yugoslavia, a compromise under which the country is still registered at the UN. This bureaucratic monster of a name is widely ignored all over the world. A majority of countries recognised Macedonia under its constitutional name. Most Greeks prefer to call their northern neighbour 'Skopje' after its capital.

To underline the claim that Macedonia is a threat to Greece, it is widely believed that the Macedonian constitution also calls for the break-away of northern Greece. This is simply a lie. The constitution actually confirms that borders will stay untouched. In its attempt to justify its own existence, the constitution does refer to the declaration of the first meeting of ASNOM, the Anti-fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia in 1944. This declaration, among many other things, did call for the unification of all Macedonians, but the constitution does not mention or repeat this call, although it does refer to the 'Socialist Republic of Macedonia' and the state that followed it. That is, it refers to two examples of statehood with clearly defined borders, not just a vague call in war-times ii.

It should be noted that the KKE also demands the change of the Macedonian constitution and the name of the republic. Thirdly, there is some anger in Greece over the Macedonian attempt in recent years to define itself by reference to a long history that goes back to Phillip the second of Macedonia and Alexander the Great, thus 'stealing' their history from the Greeks iii. This approach of Macedonian nationalism does indeed exist. But nowhere do even the fiercest Macedonian nationalists call for a unification with Greek territory, that is, to invade the country, whereas the Greek nationalists do so. The famous composer Theodorakis, still hailed by many of the European 'peace-loving' left, delivered a hate-speech saying, 'Macedonia was, is and will forever be, Greek'. So, if this is not calling for the occupation of Macedonia, it is at least a denial of its right to exist. The far right is more clear: 'Let's create a common border with Serbia' is their bellicose formulation.

The ethnic cleansing of Aegean Macedonia

So, Greek chauvinism on this issue seems rather unbased and silly but, behind it lies a history of ethnic cleansing of the part of Greece that the Greek nationalists claim to be the one and only 'Macedonia'. When Greece extended its borders to the north, in the Second Balkan War, and got hold of the region known as 'Aegean Macedonia' through the Bucharest Treaty, the majority of the people living there were not Greeks and did not speak Greek. According to various sources, about a quarter could be seen as Greeks with Turks, Jews and Macedonians outnumbering them in total.

The composition was massively changed by expelling hundreds of thousands of Turkish people and taking in Greek refugees from Asia after losing a war against Turkey in 1923. Also masses of Slavic Macedonians were expelled and driven into 'Vardar-Macedonia' which had been occupied by Serbia. Others were forcibly subjected to Hellenisation,

names were changed and the use of the Macedonian language was forbidden. This repression continues until today. The existence of Slavic Macedonians is denied. They are referred to as 'Bulgarians' if at all. Like all other ethnic minorities in Greece, such as Albanians, Jews, Roma, Bulgarians and Vlachs, they are neither recognised nor given any rights.

The situation of Macedonians in Greece can be compared to the situation of the Kurds in Turkey: No recognition as an ethnic minority, denial of their very existence as a people and suppression of the language. iv Given their brutal history, the fear of the Greek nationalists has a rationale, but the remaining Macedonian minority in Greece is much too weak to even build a separatist movement.

Macedonian Nationalism

Some expressions of Macedonian nationalism are also hard to take seriously. The attempt to define itself as a nation led to quarrels with Greece about the name, with Bulgaria about claiming some of its national heroes for Macedonia and with Serbia about the creation of its own orthodox church. The centre of the country's capital has an incredible amount of neo-neo-classic buildings and big statues of heroes representing centuries of continuity of the Macedonian people and their struggle for their own state. Under the title 'Skopje 2014' more than 600 million Euros have been spent by the former government on the creation of monuments and other symbols of a Macedonian nation to demonstrate a historic legitimacy. This 'antikisacija' has now been reduced by the new government.

Of course, Macedonians have the same right to form a nation as any other people and it is not for the Greeks or any other people to deny that. Macedonian nationalism plays an important role for what was, until recently, the ruling party. The VMRO-DPMNE is the main party of the country's bourgeoisie and it has its roots in the right-wing of the historic nationalist movement, VMRO, that started the struggle for national liberation in the nineteenth century. In order to win votes from the petit-bourgeoisie, the peasants and parts of the working-class, this party relies on Macedonian nationalism. This nationalism seems to be a bit 'invented' as the geographic region of Macedonia is much larger than the Republic but, as a part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries, it has not developed a consistent common culture or tradition. Also this region was, and is still, populated by many other ethnicities.

The real issue of Macedonian nationalism though is that it declares and treats the Albanian population as second class citizens or even intruders, though they have also lived in this region for centuries and compose around 30 percent of the population. They, not the Greeks, are the real 'enemy'. In fact, the weak state cannot even think of attacking Greece or other states like Serbia or Bulgaria, even if it wished.

One reason for the Anti-Albanianism is that Macedonia is anything but economically and socially stable itself. It saw a short civil war just 15 years ago between Slavic Macedonians and Albanians from Macedonia and Kosovo. As poor as the whole country is, the Albanian minority is the poorer part, the poorest being the Roma people. So, in everyday-life, there is discrimination and national oppression. The Albanian language was not recognised for a long time.

It was exactly this right that was promised by the social-democrats, SDSM, helping them to win many Albanian voters in 2016. It was also the pretext for the old government and president not to hand over governing power to the new SDSM-led coalition, but to organise nationalist demonstration and to let the mob storm parliament and physically attack deputies of the SDSM or the Albanian parties.

'They want to outnumber us by reproducing more and creating a third Albanian state.' - this is the narrative of Macedonian nationalists and it is equally as stupid and reactionary as the one of the Greek nationalists. The reality is that every year thousands of both the Albanian and Macedonian community have to leave the country to seek a living abroad.

Despite the nationalist tensions, there are not much anti-Greek graffiti in Macedonia, but you can see 'Death to Albanians' on the walls; as an arch-reactionary comment to the new law written bilingually and a clear pogromist threat to the national minority. With the demonstrations in March, the right wing party VMRO- DPMNE tried to regain ground that it lost to the SDSM in the general election of December 2016 and the local elections of 2017.

The change in Macedonia

The Albanian question played a big role in the last national elections and the new approach of the SDSM helped them to win. The 'Social-democratic Party of Macedonia' which had been quite nationalist before, changed its position and promised to make Albanian an official language. This is not only completely justified, given the size of the Albanian population, it had also been agreed to in the Ohrid treaty of 2003 that followed a mutiny of some Macedonian-Albanian forces supported by the UCK of Kosovo.

This demand has been attacked by the Macedonian nationalists. They claim that the plan to legalise the Albanian language was drawn up in Tirana and was therefore a foreign, 'unconstitutional', intervention and they spoke of a 'Tirana-platform'. They organised aggressive rallies to intimidate Albanians. After the narrow victory of the SDSM in coalition with Albanian parties, they supported President Ivanov's policy of denying the election of a new government by the winners of the elections. The highpoint was the storming of the parliament by nationalist thugs, supported by Ivanov and the police, in which Zaev and other members were physically injured.

In the elections of December 2016, the SDSM managed to win a considerable part of the Albanian voters, who for the first time voted 'politically' and not on ethnic grounds. This development seems to be better understood by the SDSM and Zaev, whom it serves. Levica and the rest of the left seemed to have ignored its potential for the common social and democratic struggles of Macedonian and Albanian workers and youth.

Albanian nationalism

There has been no nationalist Albanian mass-movement in Macedonia in recent years but, of course, there is a well-rooted nationalism in the Albanian part of the population.

The 'civil-war' of 2003 was more an adventure by Albanian nationalists who hoped to extend their 'success' in their separation from Serbia, but they failed completely to involve the masses of Albanians living in Macedonia.

Even though Albanians are effectively second-class citizens in Macedonia, they do not now, and did not, suffer the extreme repression, police-terror, exploitation and poverty of the Albanians in Kosovo under Milosevic's nationalist furore of the 1980s and 90s.

Albanian nationalism in Kosovo developed in this period from a completely justified struggle for democratic and social rights, including the right of separation, to awful nationalist revenge on the Serb and Roma minority and by replacing the struggle for independence by a shameful servility towards US imperialism.

This 'acute' nationalism is ideologically reproduced in Macedonia but has not gained any momentum yet. The main character of Albanian nationalism in Macedonia is as part of a reactionary bundle together with religion and patriachalism, oppression of women and LGBT-people and the hopes of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leaders for some share of the state revenue.

The role of the imperialist powers

NATO is keen to integrate Macedonia as it recently did Montenegro. The UN-envoy, Matthew Nimetz, has been given the task of reaching an agreement between Greece and Macedonia. Behind him, of course, US imperialism is pursuing its interests. Not that the US does not already have a great military presence in Macedonia and considerable military forces in nearby Kosovo. But Russia has still some influence by virtue of delivering gas to the southern Balkans and is trying to keep a foot in the door. When the open corruption and lawlessness of the former VMRO-DNPME-led government drove it into conflict with the EU, Putin immediately offered support. v

So, joining NATO was top of the agenda for the newly established social-democratic government. It is always speaking of joining NATO and EU, but this might also be for getting popular support, as membership in the EU in the eyes of the population would mean easier travelling and working abroad. The negative outcome of joining the EU, attacks on the already very low social standards, rising prices etc, might not be seen so clearly.

This rush for joining NATO was underlined by a common press-conference between Stoltenberg and Zaev on January 18th, 2018. The Greek government on the other hand also wants to show good will towards the USA and to become

NATO's favourite in the eastern Mediterranean, seeking to get ahead of Turkey, which has proven to be quite unreliable under Erdogan.

It was followed by a press-conference of Zaev with Merkel. Germany happens to be the largest trading 'partner' for Macedonia. At this conference, hopes for a quick entry into the EU were seriously dampened. In the foreground was put the adoption of EU-rules and the construction of infrastructure, especially 'Corridor 8', a connection from the Adriatic Sea through Macedonia and Bulgaria to Istanbul. According to Stoltenberg, for Macedonia, the only 'obstacle' to joining NATO seemed to be the solving of the 'name-question'.

There doesn't seem to be a real contradiction between US and EU/Germany on this field. Economically, Germany and its EU-allies dominate Eastern Europe whereas the US-strategy is more focused on pitting the Eastern governments politically against Merkel. In the current conjuncture, Zaev might be an easier ally than other Balkan/Eastern European governments for Merkel and the German leadership of the EU. Both imperialist blocks seem to have joined forces against Russia and in pacifying the western Balkans against a barrier to a bolder Turkey. Turkey, by the way, after investing into Bosnia-Herzegovina, has also started to do so in other Balkan countries. In Macedonia, the AKP has helped to set up a third Albanian Party. Erdogan also visited a joint economic forum with Croatia in Zagreb March this year, accompanied by 90 capitalists.

Greece, on the other hand, has lost much of its power on the international arena. With the imposition of the Memorandum by the Troika, it was openly humiliated. The Greek bourgeoisie decided to give in to the demands of the EU and Germany. Tsipras executed the surrender.

While the Greek Right has no other answer to this than clinging to threats against Macedonia, Tsipras' strategy is to redefine the place of Greece as a more trusted ally for NATO and EU in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Tsipras has also changed the stance of Syriza towards Israel and Palestine and continued the road that Nea Dimokratia Government started in 2010. After the murderous attack on the Gaza-Flotilla, relations between Turkey and Israel worsened and Greece tried to step in. This was a complete change, as Greece was once a country supporting the Palestinians against Zionist war and oppression. vi Obviously, Tsipras is following a plan to make Greece the new favourite servant of the US in the region and the best leader of the weak Greek bourgeoisie.

Poor positions of the Greek left

As we have seen, the reformist left in Greece is divided between those who support the nationalist furore, those who stand rather passively aside, like the KKE, and those who promote negotiations to serve their imperialist masters as do Tsipras and Syriza. In fact, it is the rivalry with Turkey, and the ambition to make Greece a more important player again on imperialist battlegrounds, which drives him. This would explain why Syriza, which still has mass-support, does not actively mobilise against the nationalist wave.

The KKE rightly attacks NATO for its imperialist ambitions and it also blames it for whipping up the nationalist wave. Whilst this is an effect of NATO's policy, solely blaming NATO also serves as a good excuse for not actively fighting the nationalism of the Greek bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie.

Its position on the Macedonian question also proves that the KKE is not a revolutionary, but a bourgeois workers' party, that is a party relying on and controlling the working-class, but which is bourgeois in its policies. The KKE does not only repeat the story of the non-existence of the Macedonian people, it also positively refers to Venizelos, the founder of modern bourgeois Greece and the Treaty of Bucharest. 'The KKE bases its positions on the undisputed fact that Macedonia is a large geographic region which is shared between four Balkan countries on the basis of the Treaty of Bucharest, signed by Venizelos in 1913, divided respectively to Greece 51 percent, Serbia 39 percent (FYROM), Bulgaria 9.5 percent and Albania 0.5 percent.' This is the only way to cancel the whole basis that supports the unhistorical theory about a "Macedonian nation. ... This is the only way to safeguard the exclusively geographic definition, if the name of the neighboring country will finally include the term "Macedonia" or any derivative.' vii

The treaty of Bucharest was the result of the 'Second Balkan War' in which Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, which just

had freed the region from the rule of the Ottoman Empire, attacked each other in the fight for a larger territory. The claims of 'national liberation', which had been directed against Turkey just before, proved to be hollow lies as the countries, plus Romania, focused entirely on territorial gains and ignored completely 'national unification'. This of course led to new national oppression and 'problems' and of course not to 'peace'. viii

On the other hand, the KKE broke with the position of the Communist International, which called for the unification of Macedonia in the frame-work of a Federation of Socialist Balkan States, long ago. For defending this position in the early twenties it was fiercely attacked by the Greek bourgeoisie and its parties. Slowly backing off from this internationalist position and eventually taking over the chauvinist bourgeois position demonstrates once again how Stalinism means adaptation to imperialism and bourgeois rule.

' and the Macedonian

Such softness towards nationalism can also be observed on the Macedonian Left. Levica, the rather new left reformist formation has not opposed the nationalist gatherings of early March this year and some of its activists have even participated. This can be easily excused because in the 'name-question' the right is fully on the side of Macedonia against Greece and the goal of the peace-process is NATO-membership.

But the litmus-test in Macedonia is always the Albanian question. Precisely on this question, Levica sides with VMRO-DPMNE and the other Macedonian Nationalists against the Albanian community, the SDSM and its government. Levica opposed the law giving equal-rights to the Albanian language. Dimitar Apaciev, one of Levica's dominant leaders, has vigorously opposed equality. In the 'name-question' he argued that any change would be 'against the constitution'. Even on a purely bourgeois basis, this argument is ridiculous, given that even bourgeois constitutions allow for change and amendment. For a Marxist, who claims that he wants to overcome the bourgeois property relations, this is even more absurd.

In any event, the assumption that VMRO-DPMNE or the Macedonian nationalists are 'anti-imperialist' is foolish. A left party, one even claiming to be 'socialist', has to have a programme to fight nationalism, to defend equal rights for all nations and nationalities and to show how this can be achieved. A Marxist programme would have to be clear on this question, that revolutionaries need to be in the forefront for the struggle for democratic rights, including the rights of national minorities, and to link this to the struggle for the overthrow capitalism and imperialism and for a Socialist Revolution.

This is the historic position of the 'Socialist Balkan Federation' already formulated by the revolutionary wing of the Second International and continued by the Third International. It combines a clear solution to the manifold national conflicts on the Balkans with an economic perspective only the cooperation of the different peoples can overcome the economic backwardness, not servility towards one or another imperialist power which will only continue the exploitation of the Balkans.

Whilst the Stalinists sometimes paid lip-service to a 'Balkan-Federation' and whilst Tito's Yugoslavia proclaimed it had overcome national tension, the Stalinist leadership proved unable to achieve this task. Indeed, the nationally rooted bureaucrats turned into more and more openly bourgeois nationalists, once the Yugoslav state went into its final crisis. Its historic failure proves not only that bourgeois 'solutions' of the national question only reproduce new national questions, but also that the expropriation of capital alone, without building socialism on the base of the organised workers' power but, on the contrary, oppressing the working class by the dictatorship of the bureaucracy, cannot develop the productive forces in a way that overcomes inequality between ethnic groups.

For a Revolutionary Perspective

The political weakness of the Balkan Left is in no way different from the weakness of the global left. The adaptation to the national bourgeoisie or to petty-bourgeois forces can be found everywhere. The historic weakness of the global left is concentrated in the lack of a transitional programme that takes up all the vital social, economic and political demands of the day, including those immediate and democratic demands which can be granted before overthrowing capitalist ownership, such as a guaranteed living minimum wage, real equality of pay for men and women, heavy taxation of the rich and the big corporations. At the same time, it warns that capitalism in its historic crisis will grant such reforms

only when faced with a threat to its very power and property. Even then, the capitalists will try to reverse the concessions as soon as the immediate danger is past or the pressure of class struggle is relaxed.

The high concentration and acuteness of national questions and conflicts on the Balkans, other examples are Kurdistan, Palestine or Pakistan, make it especially necessary to combine a principled defence of basic democratic demands with a revolutionary anti-capitalist perspective. This will allow support for national struggles and reveal their social content without subordination to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces.

The recognition of the right of national self-determination needs to be combined with the call for the Balkan Socialist Federation in order to overcome the national narrow-mindedness of the Left. An International Socialist Conference on the Greek-Macedonian conflict would be a step towards a consistent answer from the Left and overcome a situation where the majority of the Greek and Macedonian Left claim to be 'Anti-NATO' but, in reality, side with bourgeois nationalist, pro-NATO, forces.

i Applying the 'logic' of Greek nationalists could also mean that secretly Macedonia today is a socialist state, as of course the constitution of the SR Macedonia says.

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iii This complaint is also made by Bulgaria.

iv The difference is that Greece now claims the name 'Macedonia' for itself, claiming it to be a part of Greek history and culture.

v During the Macedonian Referendum, western institutions made much fuss about 'Russian Trolls' influencing Macedonian voters with 'faked accounts' not to vote for NATO-membership. Given the billions the US invested just in the Coup in Ukraine in 2014, this is a rather laughable claim. Also no proof has been produced for this accusation. It rather reveals the anti-Russian stance of the US 'peace-policy'.

vi [https://g \[2\] news.com/opinion/thinkers/how-greece-s-radical-left-fell-in-love-with-israel-1.2176715](https://g[2]news.com/opinion/thinkers/how-greece-s-radical-left-fell-in-love-with-israel-1.2176715)

vii <https://inter.kke.gr/en/articles/Statement-of-the-KKE-regarding-the-deve...> [3]

viii [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Bucharest_\(1913\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Bucharest_(1913))

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Links:

[1] <https://www.rsm.global/macedonia/en/news/new-increase-minimum-salary-republic-macedonia-july-2018>

[2] <https://g>

[3] <https://inter.kke.gr/en/articles/Statement-of-the-KKE-regarding-the-developments-with-FYROM/>