

ASSOCIATION

DESCENDANTS OF THE REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS FROM THE TERRITORY OF
THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA AND FRIENDS

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DECLARATION

ON THE OCCASION OF THE MEETING IN OHRID BETWEEN THE PRIME
MINISTERS OF HUNGARY AND NORTHERN MACEDONIA VICTOR ORBAN AND
CHRISTIAN MITSOKOSKI ON 26-27 SEPTEMBER 2024 AND THE POSITIONS
EXPRESSED THEREAT

On 27 September, we welcomed the Prime Minister of Hungary, Mr Viktor Orbán, to North Macedonia and tried to present him the essence of the problems in this former Yugoslav Republic through the prism of Hungarian perceptions.

From Mr Orban's statements we understood that he did not listen to the arguments and stated that Budapest was ready to mediate between Skopje and Sofia and whether they would accept was their business.

We are deeply surprised by such a position because the future European integration of North Macedonia does not depend on some fictional 'bilateral dispute' with Bulgaria, but on the framework of the EU-wide decision based on the proposal of the French presidency of the Council of the EU from 2022, unanimously accepted by the 27 EU Member States, including Hungary.

We were also surprised to learn of the criticism that Albania is starting EU membership negotiations on its own, although all the EU permanent representatives, including the Hungarian one, unanimously took this decision this month. We are not aware of any governmental act being adopted whereby Hungary has changed its official position!

As for the declared desire for mediation between Sofia and Skopje, there is no such need because Bulgaria has always been ready for direct contacts and dialogue with North Macedonia. What Hungary would say in a roundabout way as a mediator, Skopje can at any time say to Bulgaria in a direct conversation.

We are also deeply concerned that the Hungarian side is advocating the position of the regime in Skopje that there was a bilateral dispute between Bulgaria and North Macedonia. This statement does not correspond to the facts. The main problem since 1913 to the present day has been that a systematic genocide has been committed against the Macedonian Bulgarians. Its extent is inferred from the official statistics of the Ottoman Empire. In the two former vilayets on which today's North Macedonia is located, the predominant population was Albanian in the west and Bulgarian in the east. The ethnographic boundary between these two elements was in present-day western North Macedonia. The authorities in Belgrade and the local authorities in Skopje persecuted Albanians and Bulgarians alike. In 2001, Macedonian Albanians were

granted equal rights, but the persecution of those who, despite repression, continue to preserve their Bulgarian identity continues to this day.

Towards the end of 1944, a state-organized process of transformation of the local Bulgarian identity into a Macedonian one began on the territory of present-day North Macedonia. Until 1948, the Bulgarian Communist Party, which ruled in Sofia, kept silent about this genocide and even actively assisted it by transferring it to the Bulgarian territory in Pirin Macedonia. This caused a huge resistance among the people. Until the fall of the communist regime in Bulgaria in 1989, it was forbidden to talk about the genocide of the Macedonian Bulgarians in Yugoslavia.

However, complicity or silence about a problem does not mean that it does not exist!

After 1944, the Macedonian liberation movement became active again. Not Bulgaria, but the Macedonian liberation movement in 1945 brought out the first concrete evidence of mass repression against the Bulgarians in Macedonia, declared itself against the prohibition of the Bulgarian literary language and the creation of the new Macedonian language. Later, this same movement presented information several times at the United Nations in 1946, 1949, 1952, 1954, 1959, 1960, 1969 and 1972, to the Helsinki Conference in 1977, to the meeting of the foreign ministers of the countries of the Helsinki Conference in Madrid in 1980, and to other authoritative international forums about the genocide committed against the Macedonian Bulgarians in the territory of present-day North Macedonia. These facts clearly show that the problem in present-day North Macedonia is mainly internal: the regime against a part of its own people.

We don't know today how many people in North Macedonia have preserved their Bulgarian identity, because in the conditions of total state-orchestrated anti-Bulgarian propaganda there can be no objective sociological study of this issue. At the 2021 census only 3504 Bulgarians were officially registered, but another 20,000 were asked to prove their identity. After they showed their Bulgarian identity cards, a manipulation was carried out by replacing the category 'Ethnicity' with 'Foreign Citizenship'. Furthermore, under the control of the State Security Agency in North Macedonia, lists of prominent Bulgarians were made and the enumerators were told not to visit their households. According to official data, 120,000 people were not counted, and their data were recorded ex officio. All this is happening in Europe in the 21st century!

Today, the Hungarian government of Viktor Orbán stands in support of the refusing to reform regime in Skopje and against the part of the people that has preserved its old-time Bulgarian identity, on which the authentic Macedonian liberation movement was based. It should be recalled that when the Hungarian events of 1956 took place, this same Macedonian liberation movement supported the Hungarian people fighting for democracy.

The struggle for democracy is universal. Therefore human rights are universal, not bilateral. Today, any other ethnic community that does not even have its own nation state could be persecuted. Does that mean that there will not be a problem? It is the duty of every freedom-loving country in the world to fight against all forms of genocide, not to declare it a 'bilateral dispute'.

It is obvious that North Macedonia has no dispute with Bulgaria! On January 15, 1992, democratic Bulgaria was the first country in the world to recognize the independence of today's North Macedonia and save it from the planned partition of its territory. During the Yugoslav embargo from 1992 to 1995, it saved it from economic collapse, and in 1999 it armed it and enabled it to defend itself.

After years of patience and silence, Bulgaria just decided to support the suffering Macedonian Bulgarians. This does not change the fact that the dispute in North Macedonia is internal and that this country needs internal reconciliation. The violated human rights of one side in this conflict – the Macedonian Bulgarians – can be guaranteed by enshrining them in the constitution as an equal people, as all other ethnic communities in this country are recognised. This is neither a Bulgarian nor a European dictate, but an EU-wide condition for equality.

If the current Hungarian government wishes to mediate, let it initiate the establishment of a European commission of inquiry to contact the Macedonian Bulgarians who suffered from the repression and their descendants, to learn from them the objective facts and then to try to reconcile the authorities in Skopje and their victims, the Macedonian Bulgarians.

We hereby express our intention to participate actively in such an internal reconciliation process and to provide additional information and documentation on the facts described herein when necessary.

CO-CHAIRPERSONS:



Prof. Trendafil
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Assoc. Prof. Spas
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Ilija Stojanovski

SECRETARY:



Dimitar M. Dimitrov

Sofia, September 30, 2024