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ПОЛИТИЧКА МИСЛА

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# POLITICAL THOUGHT

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# POLITICAL AND PARTY ORGANISING IN MACEDONIA UNTIL THE END OF WORLD WAR II

## INTRODUCTION

The knowledge about the Republic of Macedonia's party system will achieve its full meaning when taking into account the historical context, which is fundamental for understanding overall processes and conditions. Having this in mind, the present paper deals with the development of the party system of Macedonia at a time when the Macedonian people did not have a state of their own, i.e. when national tendencies to build an independent state were most distinct.

Macedonia's party system was shaped by the historical conditions linked to realising people's aspirations to form an independent state, as well as the overall historical processes of establishing the system of representative democracy in its modern sense.

From a legal point of view, the history of party organising in Macedonia can be divided into three periods:

- the first period until 1944, when Macedonia was not an independent state;
- the second period from 1944 to 1991, when Macedonia was starting to realise statehood as one of the republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY);
- the third period from 1991 to this day, with Macedonia being an independent democratic state.

From a political point of view, the event which marks the end of the first and the beginning of the second period was the first plenary session of the Anti-fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM), held in the Prohor Pčinjski Monastery on 2 August 1944, when it was decided that Socialist Macedonia be founded and become part of the Yugoslav Federation. The second and third period are divided by the referendum of 8 September 1991, when national aspirations at organising the Republic of Macedonia as an independent state were realised.

The first period of party organisation in Macedonia corresponds with the global processes of establishing representative democracy in its modern sense by legal and political means, such as guaranteeing the general and equal right to vote for all citizens, regardless of their class, ethnicity, gender, or any other attribute or characteristic. During the second period, Macedonia was part of the socialist system of state organisation, in which, as opposed to political pluralism, a concept of political monism was implemented, i.e. one political party had the exclusive right to political organisation. Finally, today, in the third period, the Republic of Macedonia is implementing a true multi-party representative democracy according to the example of Western Europe.

Based on the aforementioned, this paper will give some examples, which will show that the Macedonian people has also used other than revolutionary political methods in order to achieve its national goals. This can be considered a significant experience with regard to the founding of Socialist Macedonia as a part of SFRY, which, as a collective memory, can be assumed to have contributed to shaping its new post-war constitutional and political system.

## ON THE ORGANISATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN MACEDONIA UNTIL THE END OF WORLD WAR II

Macedonia's experience in organising political parties before 1944, when Socialist Macedonia was founded, was rather rich and diverse. First, the territory was part of the Ottoman Empire, and after the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913 and the Treaty of Bucharest, i.e. until the end of World War I and the Paris Peace

Conference, it was under Serbian, Bulgarian, and Greek rule. Hence, the forms of party organisation of the Macedonians were determined by at least four factors:

1. the dynamics of the modern representative democracy's development in the respective states: the historical process of the establishment, dispersion and synchronisation of the right to vote, which took place during the 19th and 20th century;
2. the organisation of power in these states, i.e. whether they were authoritarian or democratic systems;
3. the ways of organising of the subjugated Macedonian people, which was striving to realise its aspirations for freedom and independence not only by armed, but also political means;
4. the strategies of the ruling states concerning the ways of party organisation of the Macedonian people.

Although some organisation forms of the Macedonian people cannot be considered classical forms of political party organisation as practised in representative democracies today,<sup>1</sup> given their actual activities, organisational structure and final goals, which were doubtlessly political and thoroughly national, they must be understood as political parties in the broader sense. As opposed to the these forms of organisation, as we will see, the Macedonian people was also organised in legal political entities (political parties) which were recognised by the governments of the states they were active in.

Historically, the beginning of Macedonia's party system is linked to the founding of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO; VMRO in Macedonian) in 1893,<sup>2</sup> a revolutionary liberation movement of the Macedonian people with the goal to gain political autonomy from the Ottoman Empire.

There are two main arguments that confirm this:

1. the first political parties in the formal sense of the word, as well as their founders – revolutionaries, politicians and members of parliament – were part of the VMRO, publicly appeared as such and endorsed their goals,
2. although the VMRO was not a political party in the traditional sense (but rather a revolutionary organisation), considering its overall activity, it undoubtedly had political goals, and its organisational form corresponded to the possibilities of the Macedonian people in the historical period when it was subjugated and disenfranchised.

1 For most scholars, in order for an assembly of people to be considered a political party, it has to meet at least three criteria: it should be a legal assembly, it should be united by common ideological or programmatic interests, and there should be a strong intention to take over state power in order to realise the latter (s. Savo Klimovski, Tanja Karakamisheva i Aleksandar Spasenovski, *Politički partii i interesovni grupi*, Fondacija „Konrad Adenauer“ i Praven Fakultet „Justinian Prvi“, 2016).

2 During different periods, different names were used for this organisation: Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (MRO), Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (TMORO), Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organisation (VMORO), Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (VMRO), etc. In popular as well as scientific literature, and also in this paper, the organisation is called VMRO (s. britannica.com, 25.9.2018).



While the founding of the VMRO in 1893 is identified as the beginnings of Macedonia's party system, the first political parties legally recognised by the state were formed in 1908. The Macedonian people was under Ottoman rule and thus shared the Empire's fate when, in that same year, the Young Turk Revolution began, a democratic mass movement greatly inspired by the French Revolution.<sup>3</sup> Put under pressure by this movement, in July 1908, the Sultan restored the Ottoman constitution of 1876, proclaimed *Hurriyet* (freedom) and announced general elections, which took place a few months later. Among the four elected Members of the Ottoman Parliament from Macedonia was the VMRO revolutionary Dimitar Vlahov.<sup>4</sup> From a historical point of view, this can be considered the beginning of the Macedonian people's institutionalised political activity in accordance with the rules of parliamentary democracy, the political and constitutional system which has prevailed until today.<sup>5</sup>

Another important political organisation of the Macedonian people was the Federal People's Party (NFL), lead by Dimitar Vlahov and Jane Sandanski. Founded in Salonica in 1909, it was a legal organisation in accordance with the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire. This party advocated the creation of an autonomous vilayet (district) of Macedonia within a reorganised Empire. It was banned only one year later, based on the Law on Associations introduced by the new Young Turk parliamentary majority.

A significant role in the political history of Macedonia before its division during the 1912/1913 Balkan Wars was played by the so-called socialist organisations that formed around Vasil Glavinov, Dimo Hadzhi-Dimov, and other outstanding Macedonian revolutionaries.<sup>6</sup> Ideologically positioned left to the centre, they organised a wide range of political and revolutionary activities based on social grounds, such as strikes and workers' protests.

Apart from the political parties mentioned, other political structures were active on the territory of Macedonia, too, during the given period. They were formed by the neighbouring countries with the aim to spread their state propaganda. Thus, there were legal political parties that advocated the national interests of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece.

After Macedonia was divided during the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913, its people started to organise political parties in other, more typical ways, which we will describe in the following.

3 Jusuf Hamza, *Mladoturskata revolucija vo Osmanskata imperija*, „Logos-A“, Skopje, 1995, p.236.

4 Dimitar Vlahov was elected as a representative of the left wing of the Macedonian liberation movement (s. Dimitar Vlahov, *Memoari*, Skopje, 1970).

5 s. Gustav Vlahov, *Spomeni za tatko mi*, Radio-televizija Skopje.

6 s. Nadezhda Cvetkovska, *Gragjanskite partii vo Vardarskiot del na Makedonija (1935-1941)*, Institut za nacionalna istorija, Skopje, 1996, p. 10.

When Vardar Macedonia was under the rule of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, many parties of the Serbs also addressed the Macedonian people: the Radical Party,<sup>7</sup> the Democratic Party,<sup>8</sup> the Republican Party,<sup>9</sup> and the „Dzhemiet“ Party.<sup>10</sup>

The breakthrough of the Serbian political parties during that period is linked to the fact that the law did not allow the Macedonian people to found parties that would stand for and advocate its interests, especially when it comes to its independence and autonomy.

Quite the contrary, all the Serbian political parties denied the autonomy of the Macedonian people, so that there was no significant support on this issue whatsoever.<sup>11</sup> A trial by Macedonian members of the parliament of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from the Democratic Party to form the so-called Macedonian Party was prevented by the authorities.<sup>12</sup> The only political organisation that enjoyed noteworthy support among the Macedonian people during this historical period was the Socialist Labour Party of Yugoslavia (Communists) (SPRJ), which showed some understanding for their aspirations. Founded in Belgrade in 1919, the SPRJ was renamed Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) in 1920. In the same year, the first parliamentary and local elections were held in Vardar Macedonia, where the KPJ achieved considerable success, in opposition to the Serbian parties with their endeavours.

The Communists won the cities of Skopje, Veles, Kumanovo and Kavadarci, where they formed their municipal authorities, and which became commonly known as „red municipalities“. After the invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941, the KPJ led the resistance against the occupants, which was crowned with the formation of the SFRY in 1945, a socialist state with a one-party system.

Let us now look at another significant political organisation of the Macedonians: the Macedonian National Movement (MANAPO). Based on anti-fascist and communist ideology, it was founded by Macedonian students at the universities of Belgrade and Zagreb in 1936. The political platform of MANAPO was adopted in Ohrid in 1936, with the main goals to „awaken the national awareness of the Macedonian people, adopt the national language, fight against Greater Serbian

7 The Radical Party (RP) was the first legal political party in Serbia. It was founded in 1881 under the name Radical People's Party. One of their main representatives was Nikola Pašić. The centre-right RP advocated Greater Serbian hegemonism. Their voters were mainly villagers and farmers.

8 The Democratic Party (DP) was founded in 1919 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the Yugoslav Democratic Party, a fusion of four political parties: the Progress Party, the Independent Radical Party, the People's Party and the Democratic Statehood Party. The DP was a centre-right party that endorsed Greater Serbian interests, with a voter base among the petty and middle bourgeoisie.

9 The Republican Party (RP) was founded in 1920 by Serbian intellectuals who advocated political liberalism. The RP supported republican ideas and believed that Yugoslavia should be organised as a federation of equal constituents. Due to these liberal ideas, the RP was popular with a part of Vardar Macedonia's population, who, nevertheless, did not significantly support them at the elections.

10 „Dzhemiet“ was a political organisation in Turkey before the Balkan Wars, which afterwards continued to exist in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and enjoyed the support of Muslims in Macedonia.

11 s. Nadezhda Cvetkovska, *Građanskite partii vo Vardarskiot del na Makedonija (1935-1941)*, op. cit., p. 11.

12 Ibid., p.12.

hegemonism, install democracy, and solve the Macedonian national question".<sup>13</sup> Due to their political activities, MANAPO gained popularity and influence in Vardar Macedonia and was therefore banned by the state authorities.<sup>14</sup>

Another significant political organisation of the Macedonian people during the interwar period was VMRO-Autonomous, which was concentrated on the territory of Pirin Macedonia, which was part of the Bulgarian state. This political organisation was building up a true political and military base in that part of Macedonia (a state within the state). The VMRO defined Pirin Macedonia as „a part of the territory of free and United Macedonia“ with all „freedoms: cultural, economic and political, and the entire population has to be ideologically and morally dedicated to the Organisation and to prepare for the liberation of Macedonia“. The VMRO had prohibited the activities of other citizens` parties on the territory of Pirin Macedonia, so that it held the exclusive right to political organising. In the Bulgarian parliament, the Macedonians` interests were represented by the so-called Macedonian parliamentary group, which consisted of the elected members from that part of the state, who were under VMRO`s direct political command. The members of this group publicly declared that they advocate the interests of the Pirin Macedonian population, as well as those of the Macedonian refugees from Vardar Macedonia and Aegean Macedonia.<sup>15</sup>

In Aegean Macedonia, which was part of the Greek state, the Macedonian people mostly supported the Communist Party of Greece (KPG), the oldest political organisation in the country, during the interwar period. Since its founding, the KPG had fought for the rights of the working masses, and it was the only party in Greece that stood up for the rights of ethnic minorities. Hence, the KPG was the only party to advocate the rights of the ethnic Macedonians in Aegean Macedonia to self-determination and to speaking their mother tongue, as well as other cultural rights that they were denied by the Greek state authorities.

Another significant political organisation in Aegean Macedonia was the VMRO (United), which was founded as a result of the unsuccessful unification of Macedonian organisations with the May Manifesto in 1924. The VMRO (United) was influenced by the Balkan Communist Federation and supported by the Comintern and the Macedonian communists. Its main aim was to fight for a free and independent Macedonian state, which would be an equal member in a future Balkan federation. Furthermore, it should turn into a mass people`s movement, closely related to all „national revolutionary and social revolutionary parties and organisations, which advocate the principle of self-determination

13 s. Mihajlo Apostolski, *Istorija makedonskog naroda, Knjiga treća. Period između dva svetska rata i narodna revolucija (1918-1945)*, Institut za nacionalnu istoriju – Skopje, 1970, pp. 88-103.

14 Mihajlo Apostolski, op.cit.

15 s. Dimitar Tjulekov, *Obrečeno roboľjubie. VMRO v Pirinsko 1919-1934* (promacedonia.org, 10.12.2018).

of the peoples and are prepared to help Macedonia to become an independent state".<sup>16</sup>

Yet another, no less significant political organisation of the Macedonian people during the interwar period was the Macedonian Patriotic Organisation (MPO). It was founded outside of the territory of Macedonia, i.e. in the United States of America, in 1922, as a result of the unification of several organisations of Macedonian emigrants. Paragraph 2 of the MPO's Constitution quoted the following goal of this political organisation: „to fight with legal means for Macedonia to be proclaimed an independent republic within its geographical and economic boundaries“. The MPO was prepared to establish forms of close cooperation with other organisations of oppressed Balkan peoples in support of a Balkan confederation, which Macedonia would be an equal member of. A special feature of the MPO was that it set up its own news agency, which informed the American and global public about the problems and challenges of the Macedonian people.

We end this chronological overview with the League of Communists of Macedonia (SKM), which we can define as both an illegal and legal political organisation (political party) of the Macedonian people, active on the territory of Vardar Macedonia as a part of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ). It organised and led the struggle for national liberation of the Macedonian people and the citizens of Macedonia before, during, and after World War II. The decision to found a Macedonian communist party was taken by the SKJ in 1934, but it was not formed until nine years later, in 1943, when its first plenary session was held in Tetovo.

The SKM was founded as the Communist Party of Macedonia and renamed League of Communists of Macedonia in 1953. In 1990, it was renamed SKM-Party for Democratic Transformation.

The activities of the SKM resulted in the creation of the Macedonian state, which entered the SFRY, on 2 August 1944.

## CONCLUSION

From the examples discussed, we can conclude that political organising of the Macedonian people during the first historical period took place on four levels:

1. in the VMRO, the organisations that originated from it and the ones that referred to its legacy,
2. within the communist movement,

<sup>16</sup> s. Ivan Katardzhiev, *Vo vrvcite na makedonskata istorija*, Kultura, Skopje, 1986.

3. as separate political organisations which were based on the legacy, the goals and the commitments of both the VMRO and the communist movement,
4. in the framework of legal organisations in the Ottoman Empire, i.e., after 1913 and 1919, respectively, in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece, which the territory of Macedonia was divided among.

The examples given show us that the subjugated Macedonian people did not only use revolutionary, but also political methods in order to reach its national goals, whenever this was allowed by the states that it was part of. This, in turn, proves that the Macedonian people set out for Socialist Macedonia, a part of the SFRY, with a broad experience in party politics (but also in revolution), which, as a collective memory, can be assumed to have contributed to setting up the new Macedonian post-war socialist and constitutional political system.