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Greece/Macedonia

Declaration of OKDE – Spartakos on the Macedonian issue

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1. The “Macedonian issue” is not a historic national issue, but rather a modern political one. The formation of the Macedonian nationality and national consciousness follows a parallel course with that of the other Balkan nations (Greek, Serbian, Albanian, Bulgarian), throughout the long term collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the ensuing armed conflicts among the newborn nations (Macedonian Struggle, Balkan Wars, First World War). From this point of view, two things follow. First, the term “Macedonian” used to define the nation, is just as old as the others in the region and is not an invention of the 90’s with irredentist motives. Second, the creation of new states, whose borders were drawn in the blood of the peoples of the region, did not solve any “national question”, but on the contrary many ethnic minorities remained inside each state and were persecuted without mercy. For this reason alone, the historical demand for a Socialist Federation of the Balkans remains a compass for the peoples of the area living together.

2. The Greek state “discovered” anew that there is a problem with the name of the Republic of Macedonia when it was established as an independent state, in the aftermath of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The Mitsotakis government initially unleashed a “national crusade”, creating an imaginary enemy, with a double goal: an upgrade of the role of Greece as a regional imperialist power and the building of national unity in the interior of the country. [1] Then he tried to find a compromise, in line with the will of the US and NATO but the situation was already beyond his control now. The nationalistic demonstrations for the name of Macedonia were unfortunately supported across the whole political spectrum, with a few honorable exceptions, while organizations and militants that were carrying out internationalist agitation ended up in court.

The willingness of the Greek government to play the role of the godfather to the newly founded state went hand in hand with the overwhelming invasion of the Greek capital which saw the opportunity for new markets and quickly gained the status of the protagonist in the economy of the Republic of Macedonia, like in other Balkan countries, even displacing competitors that were in theory larger. This intrusion came in a classic imperialist way (banks, telecommunications, highways, energy etc.) and was a strategic choice by Greek capital in the following years, first with the plan of integrating them into the Greek economic sphere of influence and then with the help of “hard” Euro. Alongside the influence of Greek enterprises on Macedonia’s economy, the boycott in the 90s brought an already weakened economy to its knees.

3. This propaganda about the danger from the north for “our Macedonia” is not a new one of course, but is constantly employed by the Greek state. Since the early 20th century and the “autonomists” trials, all Greek governments underline the supposed “irredentism which is created by the use of the name Macedonia alone. After the Second World War, anticommunism combined with anti-Slavism, as the new national narrative, that survives as the official position of the Greek ministry of Foreign Affairs, is that the People’s, and later Socialist Republic of Macedonia, one of the 6 Federal Republics of Yugoslavia, was a creation of Tito, who wanted to annex Greek territory and above all else the port of Thessaloniki. What it is common for all Greek governments since the fall of dictatorship, even for the current government, is that they still use this racist and anticommunist line. However, the “Macedonian struggle” of the Greek state on the international level was only through propaganda and it only became aggressive when the new state opened itself to the capitalist market.

4. On the inside front though, the Greek state applied concrete actions, initially with assimilation and Hellenization and later with open suppression of the Macedonian minority that lived and continues to live near the northern borders. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced to abandon their native language, were denied their cultural and educational rights, while whole places and families were literally renamed en masse. This policy led to the

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shrinking of the minority, which is still invisible to the Greek state. All Greek governments are responsible for this crime committed against the Macedonians of Greece for over a century.

5. All Greek governments follow the very same policy on the name of Macedonia– as on all the so-called national matters – even flirting with military intervention (talks between Mitsotakis and “anti-imperialist” Milosevic about dividing the country between Greece and Yugoslavia in the early 90s). Today’s government is no exception. It continues the same “national policy” based on the same “red lines” and mostly on the Karamanlis government’s veto in Bucharest in 2008. Any differentiation comes exclusively from the right, via the far right, nationalistic voices of ANEL. The Syriza-Anel government takes an anti-Macedonian stance and is trying to prove that a “left wing” government can lead the “national struggle”. It does this by adapting to far right and neo fascist voices, which cannot be tamed and even take to the streets as in Thessaloniki. On the other hand it is trying to convince the so called patriotic left that it can provide a solution to “national issues”, based on a popular narrative about “right-wing traitors” and “left-wing patriots”.

6. The most important alibi always called forth over the Macedonian issue, unfortunately even by the left are the nationalistic claims of the ethnic Macedonians that they descend from ancient Macedonians. Indeed the Gruevski government indeed used an extreme nationalistic rhetoric both internally and externally (project Skopje 2014, extreme suppression of the Albanian minority). But the new Zaev government does not provide this alibi anymore. In a framework of bourgeois modernization, the project Skopje 2014 was abandoned, the relations with the Albanian minority are being restored and even on the question of the name of the country they show signs of falling back as they eagerly seek entry to the EU and NATO. The most outstanding example is the election of an Albanian as president of the parliament for the first time since the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the recognition of the Albanian language as an official equal language of the state, which is of historic importance. Moreover, to focus exclusively on the geopolitics of the affair and to say that it is all due to the conflict between the USA and EU against Russia hides the real problem. We must state again that both the fantasy of descent from Alexander the Great and the entrance to the EU and NATO are part of bourgeois policy, totally incompatible with the interests of the large majority of the peoples in the Republic of Macedonia.

However, the Macedonian issue is not an issue of two nationalisms that collide. The historical inaccuracies told by both sides are not the main aspect. The main aspect is the reactionary role of the Greek state, which is based on its relative overwhelming economic, political and military power. On that basis, to fear some Macedonian “expansionism”, because of their name, is not only nationalistic but ridiculous. The great imperialist powers will try to intervene, this is evident. But this does not take the right of self-determination away from anyone. There is a reactionary side in this issue and that is the Greek state, Greek capital and its political personnel.

7. The Syriza government is trying to build a new national unity based on the “left”. The government appears as the reasonable ones, willing to put an effort to “find a solution”. To accept a name that includes the term Macedonia, might be presented by the government as a concession and the far right is accusing them for giving in. For us it is clear that the government doesn’t make any concessions at all, since they speak from a stronger position. For us the name issue is clear. To adopt the demand for a name with a composite term is to objectively align with the Greek government and ruling class. Our neighbouring country already has a name, it is called Republic of Macedonia and any other name is a direct violation of their right to self-determination. We will not be accomplices to this imposition.

8. Our task is great, as we are against this new aggressive nationalism which is being fed by government policy and nationalist demonstrations. Our foremost priority is to oppose nationalism, racism, the fascists that try again increase their visibility and to fight for internationalist voices to prevail inside the working class.

â€¢ Recognition of the Republic of Macedonia by its constitutional name

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- â€¢ No national unity with our oppressors. The Greek state has no right to the name of any other state

- â€¢ Recognition of the ethnic Macedonian minority and all ethnic minorities that live in Greece. Full rights to minorities

- â€¢ No to nationalist demonstrations. The streets belong to internationalist solidarity, not to nationalist hatred

- â€¢ Internationalist class-war based struggle against the EU and NATO– common internationalist struggle in all Balkan countries against capitalism, nationalism and imperialism

- â€¢ Socialist internationalist Balkans without war and bosses

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[1] Mitsotakis was Prime Minister of Greece from 1990-1993.