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Macedonia

Regarding the Prespes Agreement and the nationalist rallies

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The Prespes agreement between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia imposes in the clearest manner the hegemony of the Greek state over the neighboring Macedonian state and constitutes an overwhelming diplomatic and political victory for the Greek bourgeois class. According to the agreement, the Republic of Macedonia was forced to change its constitutional name to Republic of North Macedonia, to refrain from any claim over the recognition and rights of the Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece, to rename its public buildings and infrastructure (national highway, Skopje airport) so as to not include names that are considered part of the Greek history (Alexander the Great etc.), to submit its school textbooks for revision to an equal parity committee with Greek officials and to secure the free right of investment to the Greek capital in the country. In return, Greece consents to the admission of Macedonia to the NATO and the EU, which both the US and European imperialism favor as a means to gain ground in their rivalry with Russia.

The problem that the agreement is supposed to be solving is a problem created exclusively by Greece itself, on the basis of its economic intrusion into the Republic of M and its capability of exerting its economic and political coercion over the country, to the point of economic strangulation. [1] The Greek side emerges as the definitive winner, since it has managed to compel another state to change its constitutional name, which is something unprecedented in peace time, as the SYRIZA government boasts; and it has certified, once again, its key role in securing the domination and expansion of the imperialist economic and military institutions (EU, NATO) it takes part in.

The SYRIZA government is trying to present the agreement as a rational solution of a burning national issue, with mutual concessions and gains for both sides, and as a powerful blow to nationalism on either side of the border. In fact, though, both the content of the Agreement and the official rhetoric of the government officials and the prominent SYRIZA members leave no doubt about the supposed progressiveness of the Agreement. The government brags, on the one hand, that it has succeeded where all previous governments failed and, on the other, that it has fully implemented the national line determined by those previous governments, especially by the Karamanlis right-wing government and its notorious veto at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest. It is indicative that the adherents of the Agreement support it in the name of the national interests as well as of the facilitation of Greek investments in the Republic of Macedonia. As for the argument that the admission of the Republic of Macedonia in the EU and the NATO will bring peace and prosperity to the Macedonian people, it is just not serious.

Of course, this is all inconceivable for the nationalist mob that has claimed the public space for itself since last year, against the supposed betrayal against Greece and the Greek part of Macedonia. Starting with the nationalist rallies of January and February 2018 in Athens and Thessaloniki and ending up to the rallies of this year (far less massive, nevertheless), a heap of human dust, including fascist organizations, formal and informal religious groups, nationalist unions, retired military officials, ridiculous dressed up Macedonian warriors and reactionary circles within parliamentary parties came out and tried to dominate the public discourse. Putting forward the aggressive irredentist moto "Macedonia is one and only and it's Greek", the extreme right rallies managed to gather some thousands, including some that don't really belong to the extreme right; but they certainly did not achieve their objective, since they remained far smaller than the respective rallies in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, the impact that the nationalist and populist discourse as well as the national myths have on certain popular strata, and the often violent attempt of the hit squads of the Golden Dawn (the Nazi party) and other fascist gangs to massively go out to the streets again, enjoying some consensus too, meant increased duties for the internationalist antifascist movement. OKDE – Spartakos has highlighted those duties from the very beginning and struggled to undertake some of them, given its modest forces.

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The bourgeois opposition in the Parliament aided and abetted the nationalist rallies and criticized the government in a cheap, old-fashioned, reactionary manner. This was not without contradictions, though. The parliamentary group of Potami (Liberals) was dissolved, torn between its pro-European neoliberalism, which dictated a vote for the agreement, and its flirt with the New Democracy (the largest right-wing party), which dictated a vote against. PASOK voted against the Agreement, but had to expel the Democratic Left, who voted for, from its Centre-left Alliance (KINAL). At the same time, the relationships between PASOK (Social Democrats) and the group of the former Prime Minister Papandreou (the one who introduced the 1st austerity pact in 2010) [2], who was also in favor of the Agreement, were tested. New Democracy was officially against the Agreement, but, in practice, a doublespeak was obvious among its deputies, with some of them trying to compete with the Golden Dawn in terms of nationalist paroxysm, and others only raising minor issues while supporting the basics of the Agreement, despite their vote against. It is no secret that a New Democracy government would have approved the same Agreement. However, in the opposition, New Democracy chose to invest on an old fashioned ultra-nationalist rhetoric, despite the pressures of Merkel and the European People's Party (both the European People's Party and the Party of European Socialists supported the Agreement, as a means to enlarge the European Union).

On the occasion of the Prespes Agreement, but also reflecting deeper trends, the political set-up has been rearranged. The Independent Greeks (ANEL) [3] have officially left the government, objecting to the Agreement. However, SYRIZA was able to obtain a new majority in the Parliament and stay in power with the support of individual deputies from almost all bourgeois parties in the Parliament: Potami, Enosi Kentroon [4], New Democracy, and ANEL (whose parliamentary group was dissolved too). It seems that, after quite a lot of years, a new two-party system might be emerging (SYRIZA vs New Democracy), hoping to make the bourgeois political system restabilize.

It is anyway meaningful that both the adherents and those opposed to the Agreement are perfectly unanimous on the objective for economic intrusion of the big domestic capital in the Republic of Macedonia, against the rival bourgeois classes, as well as on the need to defend the "national interests" against the supposed foreign threats (which is practically the same thing). In face of the accusations by the opposition, thus, the supporters of the government insist that the Agreement is a response to the supposed irredentism of the neighbors, that it helps preserve "our" history, that it provides a protective shield against the nationalist plans of Albania and Bulgaria, and that it takes the Republic of Macedonia away from the influence of the main enemy, Turkey, which is, according to all, the biggest threat for "the country", that is, for Greek capitalists.

A special mention must be made of the issue of the Macedonian ethnicity, which the Agreement arguably recognizes, according to the bourgeois opposition. SYRIZA is right (and cynical enough) to answer that the term Macedonian/Citizen of North Macedonia in the Agreement only refers to citizenship, and not to a particular ethnicity. According to its constitution, the Republic of Macedonia is a multinational state, with several officially recognized ethnic groups and minorities, where each citizen has the right to self-determination regarding their ethnicity. This is the legacy of the Yugoslavian Constitution of Tito. In Greece, this sounds inconceivable simply because it is the only state in the Balkans where no ethnic minority is recognized, thus identifying citizenship with the Greek ethnicity. This is exactly the biggest scandal about the Agreement: it wipes the Macedonian nation and ethnic community from the map, and SYRIZA is very proud of that. In SYRIZA, they obviously believe that the best way to fight nationalism is to make "rival" nations disappear. The second point on which the government and the bourgeois opposition are unanimous is the negation of the existence of a Macedonian minority in Greece. The Agreement concludes this issue once forever, thus consolidating the oppression and sanctioning the persecutions that ethnic Macedonian citizens have suffered by the Greek state for decades.

Unfortunately, the mainstream left opposition, both the parliamentary (KKE - the Communist Party of Greece) and the extra-parliamentary (Popular Unity) [5], share the same basic assumptions. They only emphasize on the role of NATO in imposing the Agreement, omitting the oppressive role of the Greek state. They equate "nationalism and irredentism" on both sides of the border, and, in effect, they reject the Agreement because, in their opinion, it does not adequately secure the Greek side. They deny the existence of the Macedonian nation, which is a striking

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contradiction with the very history of the Communist Party, which in the 1920s adopted the position for an independent Macedonian state and in the 1950s organized an autonomous Macedonian guerilla army within its ranks during the Greek civil war. The leadership of the Popular Unity even expressed their sympathy for the nationalist rallies, although they didn't dare to officially participate.

Against this background, as soon as the Agreement was first proposed, OKDE-Spartakos determined a double task: to oppose the Agreement from an internationalist viewpoint; and to fight against the nationalist campaigns and rallies of the bourgeois opposition and the fascists. This required us to promote our internationalist positions as well as to claim the public space against the extreme right and the fascist groups. Last year, along with other internationalist and antifascist organizations, we took the initiative to organize an internationalist demonstration against the nationalist rally in Athens, on February the 4th. The demonstration was supported by several left and anarchist groups. Insisting on the position that the starting point to build an internationalist opposition to the Prespes Agreement is to recognize the Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece and the Republic of Macedonia under this very name, we organized a number of meetings and mobilizations in the context of our internationalist collaboration with other groups. We have also created links with the Macedonian left Party Levica and participated, along with other anticapitalist and revolutionary organizations, in a common international meeting in Skopje, to promote the fraternization of Macedonian and Greek workers.

Our view was, and still is, that the Agreement is not about a conflict between a supposedly progressive solution put forward by SYRIZA and the nationalist right-wing and fascist opposition. It is a conflict between the modernized and rationalized bourgeois nationalism of SYRIZA and its allies, on one hand, and the reactionary, old-fashioned and loud-mouthed nationalism of the oppositionist bourgeois parties. Our opposition to the Agreement is founded exactly on the role that the Greek state is playing both as an autonomous player and as an agent of its international imperialist allies.

The reappearance of the fascists in the streets made it necessary to organize a new internationalist demonstration in Athens, on January 20, to oppose the nationalist rally that was announced for that day. Our demonstration was successful and broke the monopoly of nationalists in Athens downtown. A qualitative breakthrough in comparison with last year was the active involvement of ANTARSYA (the anticapitalist front in which OKDE-Spartakos participates) in the preparation and in the demonstration, which secured much broader participation. Let's remember that last year, ANTARSYA confined itself to a campaign of propaganda against any participation in the nationalist rallies (which was of course important in itself, since ANTARSYA was the only visible political force to do it, whereas the Popular Unity was ambivalent), to a mobilization for defending the offices of its organizations against possible fascist attacks during or after the nationalist rallies (necessary as well, but nevertheless not enough) and to a rather vague and passionless initiative of heterogeneous political groups which ended up with a declaration of hardly any political value. By participating in the internationalist demonstration of January 20 this year, ANTARSYA has improved its influence in the antifascist and internationalist movement.

In contrast with had happened on January 20, in the mobilizations organized by KKE, the Popular Unity and other smaller groups for the day when the Agreement was initially supposed to be put to the vote in the Parliament (January 24) it was impossible to promote an internationalist political position (against the nationalist rallies and the extreme right mob, against the policy of the government, for the right of the Macedonian people to self-determination and maintain the constitutional name of their country, for the recognition of the Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece). The nationalist position of KKE and the Popular Unity made it impossible to march with them. Realizing that it was impossible to change the character of these mobilizations, ANTARSYA made the correct choice to not participate, insisting on the internationalist profile built in the demonstration of January 20.

The fight against Greek nationalism and the imperialist ambitions of Greek capitalists in the Balkan and in the Eastern Mediterranean is crucial for the fraternization of the peoples and working classes of the broader area. It is also a precondition for the emancipation of the domestic working class, since a people that oppresses another can

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never be free either. It is, finally, a prerequisite for the defeat of the big imperialist institutions, the NATO and the EU, whose Greece aspires to be the official representative in the broader area.

OKDE-Spartakos, January 2019

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[1] After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Greek governments contended that the use of the name “Republic of Macedonia” by the new independent Macedonian state would imply a claim over the titular region in Northern Greece. However, this was only a nationalist conspiracy theory, since the Socialist Republic of Macedonia had already been a constituent country of Yugoslavia under this very name for decades. Moreover, Macedonians had long been established as a nation distinct from the Greeks, Bulgarians and Albanians residing in the broader geographical area of Macedonia. The geographical area of Macedonia is nowadays divided between Greece (50%), the Republic of Macedonia (40%) and Bulgaria (10%), while a small part belongs to Albania.

[2] Papandreou left PASOK in 2015, to form his own party (KIDISO), which nevertheless entered the KINAL alliance around PASOK in 2017.

[3] The extreme-right government partner of SYRIZA from 2015 until the first days of 2019.

[4] A minor centrist bourgeois party.

[5] A left reformist split from SYRIZA, after the introduction of the 3rd memorandum by the first SYRIZA-ANEL government (August 2015). The Popular Unity failed to elect any deputies in the last election.