

# **The Macedonian Struggle for Independence**

**Celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the 1903 Ilinden Uprising**

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August 2nd, 2003 marks the 100th anniversary of the Macedonian epic struggle for independence. This makes 2003 a centennial year, a year of celebration and reflection for all Macedonians worldwide.

One hundred years ago on August 2nd 1903, the Macedonian people, discontent with oppressive Turkish rule, took up arms and rose against them. It was a fight for freedom, a fight that would forever remind new generations of Macedonians of the eternal struggle for liberty and independence.

The fact that the 1903 uprising was a failed attempt hardly diminishes or minimizes the Macedonian peoples' effort to achieve self-rule. History is made by people, through their struggles and by their creative actions. A failed attempt does not signal the end of a revolution but rather the continuation of the ongoing struggle. The Macedonian spirit will not rest until it has achieved what it set out to do.

The 1903 uprising began with the birth of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) twenty years earlier as a consequence of the political, national, economic, and cultural oppression of the Macedonian nation. This was imposed by the social, economic, administrative, and legislative crisis of the Turkish Empire and by propaganda of other foreign states interfering in Macedonia. IMRO became the newly established leader of the Macedonian national liberation and social revolution movement, struggling for national independence and social justice.

The revolutionary spark was lit on October 23rd, 1893 in Solun. A group of academics, high school teachers Damjan Gruev and Anton Dimitrov, Petar Pop Arsov a former editor of a Macedonian gazette (Loza), and Hristo Tatarchev a doctor, got together in bookshop owner Ivan Nikolov's house for an informal meeting. The main point of discussion was the plight of the Macedonian people under oppressive Turkish rule and what to do about it.

As word got around more and more Macedonians began to show interest and participated in informal discussions. Eventually an action committee was formed and, on February 9th, 1894, a formal meeting was held during which the following resolutions were made:

1. The committee will be revolutionary in nature and will remain clandestine.
2. Its revolutionary activities will be confined to inside Macedonia's borders.
3. Irrespective of nationality or religion, any Macedonian who wants to join will be allowed to become a member of the committee.

The committee also set out the following objectives, which were later ratified at the first Revolutionary Congress held in Resen in August 1894:

1. Destroy the Ottoman social system by revolutionary means;
2. Abstain from external influence and remain an "independent" organization;  
and
3. Fight for and seek Macedonian autonomy.

Being clandestine in nature, IMRO had some difficulties recruiting new members but within a year or so, its influence spread beyond Solun and into the rest of Macedonia. Initially, the organization was more ideological and less practical with the majority of its recruits being teachers, most of whom taught at the Exarchate schools inside Macedonia. To rally the masses the organization needed to educate them and bring them in line with IMRO's objectives. For that, it needed a charismatic leader who was able to talk to people at their own level, and who was free to travel without too much interference from the authorities. The man who answered that call was Gotse Delchev, an extraordinary ideological leader, a man of vision matched only by a few, the father of the Macedonian Revolution and the soul of the movement.

Gotse Delchev, the son of Macedonian patriots Nikola and Sultana Delchevi, was born on February 4th, 1872, in Kukush, a town 35 km north of Solun.

Gotse completed his elementary education in Kukush, then attended high school in Solun where he studied literature and social studies. He then attended the Solun Military Academy where he furthered his knowledge in military and scientific discipline. He was always keen to learn and kept up with Macedonian national affairs. He played an active role in the political clubs of Solun and Sofia and kept in close contact with others like himself, especially the socialists. They greatly contributed to Gotse's involvement in IMRO and helped shape the course of the Macedonian national liberation movement. The years 1894 to 1903 represented the final revolutionary stage of Gotse's short life. His career as a teacher took him to Novo Selo (near Shtip) and Bansko from 1894 to 1896, and later he became involved with the revolutionary cause, preparing the Macedonian people for the armed uprising.

Gotse was a realist as well as an idealist who loved people, hated tyranny and saw the world as a place of many cultures living together in peace. The international and cosmopolitan views of Delchev were far ahead of his time and could be summarized in his proverbial sentence: "I understand the world solely as a field for cultural competition among nations".

As a realist Gotse knew that in order for a revolution to be successful it had to be a "moral revolution" of the mind, heart and soul of an enslaved people. They

needed to feel like people with rights and freedoms, not like slaves. With that in mind Gotse set out to build a revolutionary conscience in the Macedonian population thus setting the revolutionary wheels in motion.

A decisive meeting of historic importance took place in Shtip, in early November 1894, when Gotse Delchev and Damjan Gruev met for the first time and began to plot the Macedonian revolution. This was Gotse's first assignment as a teacher and a happy coincidence that he should meet with Damjan, one of the founders of IMRO. By that time, Damjan had already witnessed Gotse's abilities and the impact they had on the mobilization and expansion of the movement.

Born in the beautiful village of Smilevo in the region of Bitola in 1871, Damjan Gruev stands out as a real giant in the struggle for freedom and independence of the Macedonian people. Damjan was educated in Solun and graduated from the University of Sofia where he took an active interest in socialist thought. After he returned to Macedonia he was given a teaching post in various schools in Bitola and Prilep. In 1894-95 he worked in the town of Shtip as a school inspector where he met Gotse Delchev. His work as organizer of the Macedonian uprising and as writer and educator of the national consciousness for freedom from slavery, was unequalled. If Gotse Delchev was the soul, then Damjan Gruev was the heart of the revolution.

Gotse believed that the liberation of Macedonia should be an exclusively domestic affair relying solely on an internally organized uprising. With that message in mind, in April 1895, Gotse set out on a mission to establish contact with the local branches of the organization and spread the spirit of freedom among the Macedonian population. Gotse believed that liberation could only be achieved through patriotic sacrifices and this could only be accomplished by energizing and fully awakening the national sentiments of the people.

Gotse was also well aware of the fatal dangers descending upon Macedonia from the Balkan monarchies and their unscrupulous aspirations openly promoted by their subversive propaganda. The most aggressive was the Bulgarian propaganda propagated by the "Vrhovists". To avoid infiltration Gotse developed a strong network and relied solely on people he could trust, to be appointed in the branch leadership of the organization. Gotse believed the only reliable way to attain liberation was through a revolutionary war fought solely by Macedonian forces. This had to be the precondition for a desired outcome and the only way Macedonia could be protected from falling under foreign domination.

Gotse's installment as undisputed leader of IMRO was consolidated during the Solun Congress of 1896 after which IMRO began to massively organize.

Gotse's abilities to "listen and learn" brought him close to the problems of ordinary people who wanted freedom but also wanted to preserve their religion, culture and way of life. With Gotse's field research in mind, IMRO's strategy was to "give the people what they want" and win them over. Initially, the strategy worked well and won IMRO the support it needed. By 1896, it was able to exert influence to a point where it acted as a state within a state taking over administrative positions from the Ottomans, leading boycotts against Ottoman institutions and offering isolated villages protection from Greek and Bulgarian sponsored brigands. In time, IMRO operatives were able to penetrate Ottoman economic, educational and even judicial functions. The downside of "giving the people what they want", opened the doors for Bulgarian infiltration.

By far the largest Bulgarian infiltration into Macedonian affairs took place in Sofia among the pechalbari. The cosmopolitan lifestyle in Sofia seduced some Macedonians who succumbed to Bulgarian propaganda. This resulted in the formation of the "External Macedonian Revolutionary Organization" better known as the "Supreme Macedonian Committee". This organization was formed in Sofia in March of 1895 and was termed the "Trojan Horse" of IMRO by Gotse Delchev. The initial membership consisted of emigrant Macedonian nationalists but in time Bulgarian military officers infiltrated its leadership. The objectives, on the surface of this "two faced" organization termed "Vrhovist" (Supremacist) by IMRO, were to fight for Macedonia's independence by armed intervention in an aggressive revolutionary manner. Its true nature, however (concealed from the people), was to undermine IMRO by subordinating its central committee to its own "Supremacist directives". This and the fact that Vrhovism masqueraded itself as "Macedonian patriotism" in the eyes of the Macedonian people very much disturbed Gotse Delchev. True to his nature being open minded Delchev, along with Gruev, took a trip to Sofia in hopes of reconciling his differences with the Vrhovists but came back more disillusioned. Instead of receiving a handshake, on March 20th, 1896, Gotse was informed that Bulgaria would no longer support IMRO and all finances and arms would be cut off. Also, from here on the Vrhovists would decide what actions IMRO would take inside Macedonia. This was indeed an attempt by the Vrhovists to usurp control of IMRO. Disappointed, Gotse turned to "Mother Russia" for assistance, but there too he found no welcome reception. Russia had no interest in helping IMRO because there were no advantages to be gained from liberating Macedonia (given Russia's current relationship with the Western Powers).

Due to IMRO's popularity, strength and ability to recognize a "Trojan Horse", the Bulgarian led organization failed to achieve its true objectives. It then resorted to violent attacks and assassination attempts with the aim of eliminating the entire IMRO structure and its leadership. They used armed intervention to provoke Ottoman reprisals against innocent village peasants and blamed IMRO. By selective propaganda and vilifying the Ottomans in the eyes of

the world, the Bulgarian led organization was hoping for a Super Power intervention to weaken the Turk and at the same time create a climate for a Bulgarian invasion disguised as a "liberation" of the oppressed Macedonians.

In the meantime both Delchev and Gruev were promoted to the rank of "District Inspector of Schools" enabling them to travel unabated and without suspicion. Using inspection tours as cover, they were able to find ways to purchase and smuggle arms into Macedonia. They also took time to address Macedonian villages and made personal contacts with the village chiefs. Many people flocked to hear what these legendary figures of men, patriots, and saviours had to say. Unfortunately it was risky to lecture out in the open, as there could be spies. As a result in May of 1896, Gotse was arrested by the Turkish authorities and spent 26 days in jail. When the Turks couldn't find anything to charge him with, he was released.

Bulgarian influence was not limited to Vrhovist actions alone. Bulgarian undercover agents were dispatched to Solun to spy on IMRO activities and report back to the Bulgarian State. The Exarchate also had policies and continued to rally the Macedonian youth for its own cause. When it seemed like IMRO was unbreakable, the Vrhovists resorted to infiltrating the IMRO leadership itself, which in time brought them some success. Bulgarian interference in IMRO policies caused hardships and internal squabbling between executive committee members and eventually caused the organization to split into hostile factions. This undermined IMRO's credibility with the outside world.

The Vrhovists badly wanted to provoke Turkey so that they could "liberate" Macedonia, but the Super Powers, especially Russia and Britain "didn't buy it" and saw their actions as provocative and dangerous. While the Vrhovist leadership agreed to curb its provocative actions, its armed wing of insurgents however, had already penetrated and captured parts of Eastern Macedonia.

Even though the invasion only lasted about two days, it became clear as to "who was who" and the true Vrhovist agenda was exposed. After that IMRO gave the Vrhovists a stern warning to "stay out of Macedonia" and to use Delchev's words, "Whoever works for the unification with Greece or Bulgaria is a good Greek or good Bulgarian but NOT a good Macedonian." After that, while IMRO worked for a "Macedonia for the Macedonians" the Bulgarian Supreme Committee openly worked for a "Macedonia for the Bulgarians". IMRO leadership strove to purify IMRO from the Vrhovist infiltration. In essence, the IMRO constitution was bolstered to exclude Vrhovist demands and still be able to give the Macedonian people what they wanted. The IMRO leadership, without much success, made attempts to infiltrate and sabotage the Vrhovist Supreme Committee by making frequent trips to Sofia and attempting to rally dissident emigrant forces inside Bulgaria.

While the Vrhovists were plotting against IMRO and the Macedonian people from the north, a new menace was brewing from the south. On April 9th, 1897 armed Greek bands began to aggressively cross into Macedonia. The Turks protested this action to the Super Powers but the Greeks denied responsibility, insisting all along that it was the Macedonian Cheti. It didn't take too long before the Turks took the offensive and drove the Greeks out of Thessally. When the Turks were about to overtake the entire country the Super Powers intervened on Greece's behalf, to save her. The Greek Government in charge of the invasion fell out of grace. When a new government was elected it agreed to pay a hefty fine of four million Turkish pounds, as well as give up Thessally to the Turks. In addition to losing grace, Greece had to relinquish control of her own finances (to the Super Powers) to ensure prompt payment of the fine. The Super Powers, without German support, forced the Sultan to accept the offer and sign a peace deal. The Germans never forgave the Greeks for lying to them about their aggressive actions against the Turks. The Germans at that time were responsible for Turkey.

For the moment, outside of Greek brigand actions, Greece was not a direct threat to IMRO.

IMRO demonstrated great leadership by its ability to organize Macedonia into seven revolutionary districts Solun, Serres, Strumitsa, Shtip, Skopje, Bitola and Endrene (Macedonian Dardannelles). It also demonstrated its weaknesses. Having allied itself with the poor village peasants and striving to refrain from obligations and debts, IMRO found itself poor, financially. The IMRO committee was unable to raise all the necessary funds to finance its campaigns. While the leadership turned a blind eye, the regional chiefs resorted to kidnapping rich landowners, merchants and foreign dignitaries for ransom. Kidnappings did not exclude foreign missionaries like Miss Stone who fell into the hands of Sandanski's Cheta. Taken by the plight of her captors, Miss Stone herself voluntarily made sure the ransom was paid in full.

Short of finances mostly due to the unfriendly terms with the Vrhovist Supreme Command in Sofia, IMRO found itself lacking the necessary arsenal to wage war. Subordination to Bulgarian demands was out of the question so Gotse had to look elsewhere to acquire his weapons. Efforts were made to purchase weapons from Greece, Albania and even from the Turks themselves but without too much success. By 1897 the situation was desperate so the IMRO leadership resorted to purchasing from the black market and even stealing weapons. One such purchase was made from the Bulgarian Military. The military allowed the sale of outdated guns but later refused to sell cartridges, fearing the weapons may be turned against them. In October 1900 Chakalarov, a local chief in the Lerin/Kostur regions who spoke Greek, dressed up as an Albanian pretending to

be from Ianitsa. He was successful in purchasing some arms from Athens. Later attempts by others however, were not so successful. On one occasion, a translator betrayed the purchasers to the Turkish consul on the advice of a Greek priest. After that the Turks trusted this translator and made him a sergeant in their gendarme. He served the Turks well and brought them much success in their search and destroy missions until he discovered that he could make even more money by taking bribes before turning people in. As a result of this man's actions band members in many villages were killed.

The lack of sufficient arms brought home the realization that this "uprising" was going to be a long one. Here again Gotse and the IMRO leadership proved their worth by adopting a policy of self-arming. With a little bit of skill in weapons manufacture, learned from the Armenian Revolutionaries, IMRO set up a number of munitions factories in remote and secluded areas, capable of producing homemade bombs and other explosives. Unfortunately, on the 6th of August 1900 during a raid at one of these factories, Damjan Gruev was arrested by the Turkish authorities and imprisoned in Bitola where he remained until 1902. Despite being in prison he was in constant contact with the leaders of IMRO. From Bitola, the Turkish authorities banished him to Podrum Kale in Asia Minor. In 1903 a few days before Easter, the Turks granted amnesty and Damjan was set free. He came back to active duty in April 1903 and at once went to Solun where he learned of the decision taken to proclaim the Ilinden uprising.

In spite of all efforts made to obtain them, the Macedonian "Cheti" lacked arms but had plenty of courage to make up for it, which in time put fear in the Turkish hearts.

As IMRO grew beyond its ideological stage, it began to recruit, equip and train fighters. Volunteers were recruited mainly from the villages, young men who were willing to fight for their freedom. Those who were in trouble with the law (brigands) were armed and recruited into active duty. Those were men who flourished by attacking Turks and stealing from them. They were admired for their courage and ability to live free. They were men who practiced the art of war, knew how to live in the open, how to ambush and hide. They were the men who taught the young Macedonian recruits to fight and win.

The rest were reservists and lived at home, only called to duty as required. Each reservist was expected to purchase and secure his own rifle and ammunition. Recruitment was carried out in utmost secrecy. Even women were enlisted in the Macedonian revolution, but their role was limited to cooking, washing, mending clothing and nursing the wounded.

The primary role of a fighter was to defend the people from Turkish and brigand attacks. The Cheti consisted of about five to ten men, organized for rapid



mobilization and quick response. The goal was to have one Cheta responsible for one village (preferably their own) in all of Macedonia. The leader of each Cheta was chosen for his abilities to lead his men, and more so, for the peoples' confidence in him to protect their village. To respond quickly, the Cheta had to be familiar with the village's terrain and escape routes. To maintain secrecy all orders were given verbally.

The IMRO mobilization managed to elude the Turkish authorities for a long time. However, an unfortunate discovery of some explosives accidentally uncovered the secret and led the Turkish militia on wide "search and destroy missions". The Turkish militia's conduct unfortunately was less than honourable when the soldiers began torturing innocent people and burning property in order to obtain confessions. The Cheti's responsibility was to ambush the militia, using guerrilla tactics, before they entered villages and prevent them from doing harm. This however, did not always work so some of the Cheta Chiefs resorted to retaliations and reprisals for crimes already committed. Although poorly armed and vastly under-manned (sometimes as high as 10 Turks to 1 Macedonian), the Cheti fought fierce battles and gained legendary reputations among both the Turks and the Macedonians. Unfortunately, as the Ottoman authorities became more aware of IMRO's intentions the Turkish militia grew in number with additional soldiers. At about the same time the Exarchate, suspecting IMRO affiliation, began to dismiss Macedonian teachers on mass. Even though most Macedonian teachers despised working for the Exarchate, they used the schools as a means of promoting IMRO's aims. They frequently gave lectures, taught Macedonian patriotic songs, canvassed house to house etc. The loss of these strategic positions was a blow to IMRO. A more severe blow however, came in April of 1897 in what was termed as the "Goluchowski-Muraviev Agreement". This was an agreement drawn up by Tsar Nikolas II of Russia and Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria regarding the future of the remainder of the Ottoman Empire. In part the agreement stated that, at some future time, the Macedonian territory would be divided equally between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. This was indeed bad news and as history showed, it was devastating for IMRO and disastrous for the Macedonian people.

In about 1898 the Bulgarian Exarchate, instructed by the Bulgarian Prime Minister, created a Vrhovist organization inside Macedonia, based in Solun known as the "Revolutionary Brotherhood" which in turn began to form its own Cheti. While pretending to be part of IMRO, the purpose of this organization was to carry out terrorist activities and, in the eyes of the world, discredit the real IMRO.

By the year 1900, IMRO's enemies were growing in number and their acts intensified in ferocity. IMRO's woes were just beginning when they discovered that the Vrhovists had dispatched six assassins to murder Delchev and

Sandanski (a legendary Cheta chief affectionately known as the "Tsar of Pirin"). The Vrhovist Cheti were raining terror on Macedonian villages, provoking the Turks to act. Although never proven, it was alleged that the Vrhovist leaders were working with the Turks in successfully arresting members of IMRO, destroying munitions depots and torturing, raping and murdering people. Even the Turks themselves participated in sabotage tactics. Several Greek spies were killed at one time and IMRO was blamed. As a result of this, many organizers were rounded up and arrested. In reality however, it was Turkish Begs who committed the crimes as was discovered later. The same Begs were seen attacking Turkish tax collectors.

The six assassins, frustrated by their inability to assassinate Delchev and Sandanski, began to attack people, burn down villages and steal money, putting the blame on IMRO. Several important leaders, including the famous "Marko Lerinski" (the "Tsar of Lerin"), Cheta leader of the Lerin and Kostur Regions, was killed in these attacks.

All was not lost however as Sandanski was ready for the Vrhovists in the next attack in September 1902, and defeated them. The Turks did the rest by crushing the Vrhovist remnants in November of the same year.

The disturbances and civil strife were enough to convince Turkey that yet another uprising may be imminent and that she should take action to prevent it. As usual, violence was answered with more violence. The Turks initiated a wide campaign of search and destroy missions exacting serious retribution and terror on the village population. In addition to regular Turkish troops, the Ottomans now enlisted reserves from the Albanian Muslim fold. Every bridge, railway cutting, and railway tunnel was guarded. Also, every village had a garrison of ten or more troops guarding it. While the Turkish troops were content with "fighting it out" with the Cheti then retiring to their barracks, the Albanian reservists avoided direct confrontations and preferred to join the Bashi-Bazouks (armed civilian Muslims) in pillaging and plundering the villages. These gendarmes, recruited from the Albanian Gheg Muslim community, had a vested interest in disorder. The gendarmes allowed law-breakers to exist so that they could keep their employment. They rarely engaged in combat and their meager pay was always in arrears so they readily accepted bribes to make their living. Both the Patriarchate and Exarchate were known to bribe the Albanian gendarmes in order to allow Greek and Bulgarian brigands to function freely.

To make a bad situation worse, at the end of August 1902, the Vrhovists arrived in Macedonia uninvited and began to issue orders directly to the local chiefs to start the rebellion. According to Vrhovist plans the rebellion was ordered to begin September 20th, 1902. This was news to IMRO. This latest bold Vrhovist action turned a lot of heads including that of Vasil Chakalarov. Chakalarov was

a respected chief who managed to sway the people away from the Vrhovists. But the Vrhovists began to publicly accuse Chakalarov and the others of being cowards and peasants for not wanting to fight. When that still didn't work, Chakalarov was personally called a thief, allegedly having stolen a fortune from the Vrhovist money allocated for purchasing arms. Fortunately the Macedonian people knew that Chakalarov was a decent man. They also knew that the Vrhovists didn't contribute any funds to purchase arms. Left alone, unable to start the rebellion, the Vrhovists tucked their tails and went elsewhere to cause trouble.

This latest Vrhovist action did not go unnoticed by the Turks and put IMRO in a difficult position. The Vrhovists, for a long time wanted to get IMRO into a fight with the Turkish army but were so far unsuccessful. This time, unfortunately, their wishes were about to come true. The Vrhovists believed that a fight with IMRO would weaken Turkey enough to make a Bulgarian invasion possible. They encouraged the Cheti Chiefs to "start the insurrection and Bulgaria would finish it" for them. "Bulgaria has hundreds of thousands of troops standing by and will come to your rescue as soon as the first shot is fired" is what the Vrhovists were preaching to the Macedonian chiefs.

IMRO knew that its fighters were not ready for a frontal attack on the Turkish militia. They also knew that fighting or not, the Turkish militia was going to destroy Macedonia, village by village one way or another. The Vrhovists, on the other hand, could not be trusted for their help because they had no intention of honouring their promises. Their actions had made that point very clear in the past.

In either case, IMRO had no choice but to act soon. The Turkish search and destroy missions were putting many innocent people in jeopardy, including women and children. Local informants, Greek, and Bulgarian brigands did not hesitate to inform on the villages, especially if they had an axe to grind. On many occasions Patriarchate and Exarchate brigands (hired goons) were put out of action by the Cheti and that made their benefactors angry, who in turn informed on the villages. Brigands were hired to harass and exact terror on villagers to sway them to change allegiance from one church to another. The Cheti were fierce fighters and fought gallantly when it came to protecting their villages but were undermanned and poorly armed. As much as they wanted to they were not always capable of standing up to the large and well-equipped Turkish militia. The militia on the other hand, did not always operate under the best of ethics and were open to bribes. The poor people who couldn't afford bribes fared the worst. Some say it was less of a punishment to produce a rifle than not to have one at all. Some resorted to purchasing rifles and turning them in just to receive a lesser punishment. On many occasions the houses of those suspected of aiding IMRO and the Cheti were burned to the ground. The Turks didn't

hesitate to jail old women accused of that crime. Historical accounts show that during the height of the search and destroy activities the jails in Macedonia were filled beyond capacity. In fact a Solun jail with a capacity of 500 was holding 900 prisoners (some were held in the White Tower). There is an old Macedonian saying: "There is nothing worse than being locked up in a Turkish jail."

On January 31st, 1903 the Turks declared IMRO illegal and sought ways to destroy it. This gave the Vrhovists the necessary momentum they needed to become a wedge between those in IMRO who wanted an immediate uprising and those who believed that an uprising at this point in time was suicidal. Gotse Delchev was against this "willing sacrifice" and hoped to find a better solution, but time was running out.

A second Solun Congress dominated by the Vrhovists was staged in February of 1903. Delchev and most of IMRO's loyal supporters did not attend. A resolution was reached, but not ratified by the regional committees, that an uprising would take place on Ilinden, the 2nd of August 1903. To weaken the Turks, the Vrhovists staged a number of bombings and terrorist acts. The Solun to Tsari Grad railway was bombed on March 18th as was the Solun Ottoman bank, a month later. This did not weaken the Turks as expected but instead brought more Turkish troops into Macedonia and further escalated the violence against innocent civilians. If that was not enough, the sudden rise in violence against Ottoman institutions was not well received by European investors and businessmen who saw Ottoman Macedonia as a safe place to invest. The few lonely voices in London calling for Macedonian support were quickly drowned out by the many voices of discontent calling for the demise of the "terrorists".

Tragically, the Turks killed Gotse Delchev after the IMRO Smilevo Congress had started.

Gotse devoted his life to the Macedonian national revolutionary movement and to the Macedonian revolution. His figure cannot be separated from the glorious epic of Ilinden, although an enemy bullet had cut short his life on the eve of the uprising.

On May 4th, 1903, on his return from Solun after his meeting with Damia Gruev, Gotse was surrounded by the Turkish army in the village of Banitsa in the region of Serres. In this unequal battle Gotse was hit in the chest by an enemy bullet.

The news of his unexpected death spread throughout Macedonia. Macedonian hearts were plunged into bitter grief. Over Macedonian fields floated the mournful notes of the song sung by the popular singer in the hours of combat, "by the Turkish Mauser rifle the hero Delchev was wed, to the young bride

Macedonia, to the dark enslaved land". But he did not die. He remained alive forever in the hearts of the Macedonian people. The deeds of Macedonia's "greatest revolutionary" will shine for all time in the national consciousness of all Macedonians.

A solemn tribute of glory, a moving tribute of national pride has been paid by the Macedonian people to the illustrious revolutionary in his native town. This was a noble act of veneration on the part of the Macedonian people towards the glorious remains of the great architect of Macedonian freedom, a heartfelt gesture of supreme devotion (Giorgio Nurigiani).

Termed the Bitola Congress, the purpose of the Smilevo Congress was to review the resolutions from the Vrhovist dominated Solun Congress held earlier in the same year. Damjan Gruev (a native of Smilevo) chaired the Congress and tried hard to present the situation realistically by arguing for and against an early uprising. When the matter was put to a vote however, the majority declared themselves in favour of an uprising. With these words, "better an end with horrors than horrors without end", Gruev also voted in support of the Ilinden rebellion. From here on there was no turning back. A general staff was elected with Gruev as the head and preparations for the uprising began. In due time plans were made, a military strategy was prepared, weapons, medical supplies and food-stuffs were requisitioned and stock piled, Cheti were organized and training drills performed.

On July 26th, 1903, by a dispatch to the Great Powers via the British vice-consul in Bitola, the General Staff formally announced the uprising. Then on July 28th, 1903, IMRO dispatched mounted couriers to all the sub-districts with the message "let the uprising begin". "Brothers! At last the long expected day of settling our accounts with our age-old enemy has come. The blood of our innocent brothers who have fallen victim to Turkish tyranny cries aloud for vengeance! The violated honour of our mothers and sisters demands restitution! Enough of misery and shame!...the appointed day on which the people throughout Macedonia and Andriopole will face the enemy openly, with arms in hand, is August 2nd. Follow your leaders on that day, and rally under the flag of freedom. Down with Turkey! Down with the tyrants! Death to the enemy! Long live the people! Long live freedom!" (Michael Radin)

On the same day the General Staff informed the Ottoman Director of Railways to warn travelers to choose a different mode of transportation in order to avoid being hurt.

Despite all odds the brave people of Macedonia heroically rose to the task with valour. They knew well that the fight they were being forced into might not

bring them what they wanted but they chose to fight anyway. It was a fight for freedom and freedom after centuries of slavery was valued above life itself.

It was dawn August 2nd, 1903 and the men could see their breath in the cool, still mountain air. Darkness was finally giving way to dawn. Not a soul had slept all night. The fervour and business of the night before had died down. There was only silence now as darkness slowly yielded and each man reconciled his thoughts and comforted his fears. The stillness was interrupted by what seemed like a thunderbolt, when the Cheta chief soberly announced, "It's time." Like Olympic sprinters, the men rose to their feet ignoring the stiffness of the long night's motionless rest. Hearts pounding, they picked up their gear and rifles and began the descent down the mountain towards the chiflicks (estates) below. It was still dark and there was no one in sight. The men crept up on the barracks in silence. The chief motioned with his hand and the men quickly scattered and took up their positions. The barracks were now surrounded. When a guard inside the barracks stepped out, the crackle of rifle fire broke the silence of the new day. The black smoke of gunpowder greeted the first rays of the sun and the cries of the wounded disturbed the serenity of the morning stillness. It was August 2nd, 1903, Ilinden, a new dawn for the Macedonian people.

By mid-day the Western Region of Macedonia was on fire as church bells rang, rifles crackled and bellowing smoke enveloped mountains and valleys alike. Five thousand strong had assembled to show their distaste for Turkish rule. They had no cavalry or artillery except for the few cannons made of cherry wood, which were more dangerous to them than to the enemy. But they had faith, spirit and trust in each other. They were the Macedonian Komiti (freedom fighters).

On August 2nd the Cheti of Chakalarov and Kljashev attacked the Turkish troops, stationed in the villages of Zagorichani, Visheni, and Drebeni. The 350 Macedonian fighters carried out the attack from all sides. After a three-hour battle, five Turks were killed and the rest took flight from the villages leaving behind ten rifles, cartridges and some food. There were no casualties on the Macedonian side. The fleeting Turks spread panic in Kostur with their stories of red flags, thunderous cheering, loud battle songs, and the number of Macedonian fighters which they multiplied a hundred fold.

Following Damjan Gruev's orders from Smilevo, the village Cheti combined forces to form the following: 650 Cheta from the Smilevo and Gjavato Region, 400 from the Krushovo Region, 350 from the Kichevo Region, 250 from the Bitola Region, 880 from the Ohrid Region, 450 from the Resna Region, 420 from the Demir-Hisar Region, 300 from the Prespa Region, 700 from the Kostour Region, and 450 from the Lerin Region.

The Cheti under the command of capable leaders such as Damjan Gruev, Vasil Chakalarov, Petar Pop Arsov, Pitou Gouli, and others fared well and enjoyed considerable success in the few weeks before the Turkish militia began to amass. The local villagers also joined the movement giving moral support to the fighters. Even men from other regions, that had not yet risen, left their homes and came to fight.

All in all the Macedonian people possessed the will to fight but lacked the rifles and ammunition with which to do it.

When the rebellion began, as a precaution, most villages were evacuated. People who left the villages took up residence in secluded places up in the mountains. They took with them whatever they could carry and set up camp with temporary shelters constructed from tree branches covered with vegetation. The livestock they took with them were fenced out of sight in wooded areas. They even built underground ovens to cook food and bake bread in safety.

Some villages that didn't join the rebellion felt it was unnecessary to evacuate because they posed no threat to the Turks. One such village was Neokazi near Lerin whose residents stayed home thinking they would be safe. When the Turkish militia passed by, not only did they raze the village but they also turned on the civilian population. Not being satisfied with just burning the village, the Turks summoned about 60 Macedonian men and placed them under arrest. On their way to Lerin the Turks, instead of taking the men to jail, tortured and massacred them in cold blood. Eyewitnesses reported observing the Turks lining men up in rows and firing at them just to see how many one bullet could kill.

Three days later, it was Armensko's turn. After losing a skirmish to Chakalarov, Haireddin Bimbishi's (the butcher of Smrdesh) troops, defeated, angry and embittered were heading for Lerin when they came across a welcoming committee at Armensko. The priest and other members of the village went out to greet and welcome the Turks, but the Turks were in no mood for pleasantries and murdered the welcoming committee on the spot. Bimbishi's men then turned on the defenseless village and pillaged, burned and satisfied their brutal lust undisturbed. Sixty-eight of the villagers were massacred and ten women and eight girls were violated.

Turkish soldiers had orders to burn down all empty villages because it was a sure sign that they belonged to the families of insurgents. The rest were to be spared. In practice however, that was not the case. Angry Turks aching for revenge spared no one. Those Macedonians who didn't join the rebellion, thinking that they were safe because they wished no trouble, experienced the full wrath of the savage Turk. Not only did they lose their homes but most lost

their lives as well. It was a hard lesson learned. It was most unfortunate for the sick and bedridden who couldn't escape and were burned alive where they lay.

As battles raged on throughout Western Macedonia, the Cheti put down most of the local Turkish garrisons. They destroyed bridges, railway lines and communications centers, captured most chifliks and briefly liberated some regions such as Kichevo, Demir-Hisar, Kostur, Lerin, Klisoura and Neveska. The cities of Kostur and Lerin themselves were not liberated. The most successful and highly celebrated of all battles however, was the storming of the town of Krushevo. Nikola Karev led the Cheti in the attack and defeated the local Turkish garrison with ease. A teacher in Krushevo, Nikola also doubled as a chief inspector of IMRO's Cheti in the area. The Macedonians quickly took over the most strategic places like the Post Office, Town Hall and local Police Station and declared Krushevo liberated. True to their democratic commitments, the leaders of the liberating force constituted the Krushevo assembly, which appointed a committee of sixty members, twenty from each of the community's Macedonian, Vlach and Albanian population. The committee in turn elected an executive body of six delegates, two from each community, which operated as a provisional government. The government in turn established a financial, judiciary and police force.

At Krushevo, under the rays of temporary liberty, fraternity and equality, national hatreds were cast out and peace and unity reigned. For eleven whole days Krushevo lived as a little independent state, the first Republic in the Balkans. Although in miniature and clothed with flesh and blood "that ideal" spurred Macedonians to fight on.

The Ilinden uprising is an achievement of great importance for the Macedonian people. There are things about it which stagger the imagination and cause this general insurrection to be ranked as a "great historical event". Every Macedonian must always remember and take pride in that.

The whole people rose with a frenzied, irresistible urge for immediate freedom. The Macedonian people's faith made them believe in their creative possibilities, for only a people strong in spirit is able to pluck up courage and with full confidence venture on an historic undertaking.

Through this courageous uprising, unique in its kind for noble daring, the Macedonian people expressed not only their love of freedom and justice, but also of moral power. This uprising remains even today an unrepeatable human act of supreme self-sacrifice for a people's freedom.

Ilinden will remain in history a sacred name for every Macedonian. It is written on the tables of the laws of the Macedonian people and will shine for evermore,



because it is a magnificent expression of the Macedonian peoples' limitless love for their native land, their unquenchable thirst for freedom, their inflexible will for a new life, and a real inner essence of their being (Giorgio Nurigiani).

True to his socialist ideals, Nikola Karev drew up the famous Krushevo manifesto; a document aimed at eliciting support from all the communities including the Muslim Turks and Albanians.

"Fellow townsmen and dear neighbours!

We, your neighbours and acquaintances in fair Krushevo and its smiling villages, without distinction of creed or nationality, being no longer able to bear the tyranny of the traitors, thirsting for blood and human flesh, who wish to reduce us to beggary and make our dear, rich land a wilderness, have today lifted up our heads and decided to defend ourselves with arms against these enemies of us and you. You know very well that we are not evil people, you understand that continual oppression has driven us to stake all on a bid to live like men or die like heroes!

Having lived on this earth as brothers from the times of our ancestors, we consider you as on our side and wish to remain so till the end.

We have not aimed our guns at you. That would have been an insult on our part. We have not taken up arms against a peaceful, hardworking people who earn their bread in the sweat of their brows; you are our brothers with whom we have lived together in the past and shall do so in the future. We have not risen to kill, to burn your houses, steal and loot.

The ruin inflicted on our poor, bloodstained Macedonia by numerous despots is enough. We have not risen to convert your mothers and sisters, your wives and daughters to Christianity. We are not traitors, but revolutionaries sworn to die for justice and freedom. We are rebelling against tyranny and slavery, against traitors, against the violators of our honour and those who exploit our sweat and labour.

We sympathize with you as brothers, for we understand that you are slaves like us, slaves of the kings and their lordlings, slaves of the aggressors and destroyers who set fire to our country on all sides and have forced us to make a stand for justice, freedom and a life fit for men. We invite you to take part in the struggle, too. Come, brother Moslems, and fight the common foe! Come under the banner of independent Macedonia. Come and break the chains of slavery that we may be saved from torture and suffering. Come, brothers, join your hearts and minds with ours in the fight for freedom that our families may be able to live, work and progress in peace.

Dear neighbours! We understand that as Turks, Albanians and Moslems you think that the kingdom is yours and that you are not slaves since the Sultan's flag bears the crescent not the cross. That you are mistaken, you will soon see and understand. We shall fight for you and for ourselves, and if need be shall die to the last man under the flag of our common freedom. Freedom or death is written on our brows and on our banner of blood and there is no going back.

May God bless our holy struggle!

Long live all true sons of Macedonia who fight for justice and freedom." (Michael Radin).

The "Krushevo Republic" unfortunately, lasted only eleven days, but it was a glorious Republic that will forever remind the Macedonian people of their eternal struggle for independence and their thirst for freedom. The liberation of Krushevo imprinted on the new Macedonian generations the legacy of a timeless and irreversible march towards self-determination. IMRO came a long way from a group of academics deliberating what to do in the face of repression to delivering, in a true revolutionary fashion, a democratic Republic with all the socialist trimmings.

Here again, we see the Macedonian desire for multiculturalism and for a new multiethnic society waiting to resurface. The Republic was constituted on a multiracial basis in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the Macedonian people.

Next to Krushevo, Kostur, under the command of Lazar Pop Trajkov and Vasil Chakalarov faired second best in the tactical mobilization of the Cheti. These brigades staged successful raids and liberated Klisura and Neveska. They then returned southward and with the support of over three thousand villagers attacked Kostur, but without success. In the meantime other Cheti attacked and liberated Ohrid, which remained free for almost three months. The Ohrid attack was the most successful in terms of advance planning and administering the establishment of medical aid, underground workshops, secret bakeries and securing foodstuffs. Ohrid later became the center for establishing refugee camps for many displaced persons.

Uprisings outside of western Macedonia were limited to swift guerilla actions consisting mostly of attacks against Ottoman institutions, bombings of railway lines and the occasional skirmish with the Turkish militia. Many Cheti were successful in capturing important Turkish officials with aims of constructing dialog for prospective negotiations but in actuality they met with little success.

Vrhovist involvement, as expected, was minimal during the uprising and brought to light once again the true nature of Vrhovism (Macedonia for the Bulgarians).

As the Cheti fought gallantly putting down garrison after garrison in the larger towns many of the smaller villages were left unprotected and open to Bashibazouk and Turkish militia attacks. Keeping in mind the Neokrazi and Armensko incidents, many of the Cheta chiefs felt compelled to return home to repel such attacks. Due to this and the fact that the Cheti were overpowered by the numerically superior Turkish militia, in the short term, a large-scale operation against the Turks never materialized. Unfortunately, as time passed so did the opportunities for a decisive strike, as an even larger Turkish force was amassing.

The initial success of the rebellion was a surprise to the Turks especially since the Turkish forces were numerically superior to those of the rebels. The Cheti however, demonstrated their abilities in battle and more than matched the numbers with will. Turkey unfortunately, was determined to put down the rebellion and amassed additional forces deploying a total of 167,000 infantry, 3,700 cavalry and 440 pieces of artillery (all cannons). Krushevo alone was surrounded by 20,000 Turkish troops with 18 cannons against an encircled force of no more than 1,200 rebel fighters. The battle to retake Krushevo began on August 12th with the Macedonians crying out "Sloboda ili Smirt" (liberty or death) against the onslaught of Turkish cannon fire. Pitu Guli and his men fought gallantly and provided stiff opposition to the Turkish advance but were no match for General Baktiar Pasha. Baktiar was a skilled war veteran who overwhelmed the Cheti by attacking the entire region simultaneously. Soldiers surrounded the region, encircling it with cannon fire, and simultaneously attacked every Macedonian stronghold inside, cutting off all reinforcements and outside support.

After the mountains lit up with gunfire and smoke filled the skies, no Super Powers came to the rescue. Macedonia was left alone to feel the full fury of the Ottoman Empire's army and to pay for all of Europe's sins committed against the Turks.

But in these historic days of faith and sacrifices, the supreme effort of the Macedonian people to free themselves from the age-long Ottoman yoke was suppressed by bullets and the sword. A corner paradise of Macedonia was reduced to ashes and dust, a real graveyard. The children were barbarously slaughtered as they slept on the bullet-pierced breasts of their hapless mothers, and near them lay the disfigured bodies of their fathers. In the mountains, like enraged wild beasts the Turks pursued and slew like game the gallant Macedonian revolutionaries who till then had escaped death, while the town

prisons were packed with thousands of innocent people and the gallows were being put up at the cross-roads.

The last act of the Ilinden uprising, the tremendous Macedonian tragedy of August 1903 was played out. Those revolutionary days were the expression of a secular thirst for revenge and freedom. On one side was the tortured visage of the fighting slave, on the other the horrifying sadism of the tyrant and his agents, the army and the hordes of bashi-bazouks. The tragic consequences of this tremendous clash affected the villages and towns of the revolutionary districts where the people rose en masse.

The furious flame of Ilinden was put out in blood and ashes, but the will for new struggles remained. Ilinden was their torch. The people swore to themselves that the new Ilinden, which was bound to come, should be the master of its fate.  
(Giorgio Nurigiani)

Once Krushevo fell, one by one other IMRO strongholds began to yield, winding down the ten-week-old rebellion. In Krushevo Baktiar Pasha allowed his troops to kill, pillage and rape for three days, permanently devastating the town. 117 civilians were murdered, 150 women were raped and 159 houses were burned.

In the Ilinden aftermath, according to Radin, in total 4,694 civilians were murdered, 3,122 women raped, 12,440 houses burned, 201 villages razed, 75,835 people left homeless and about 30,000 people left the country for good, becoming permanent refugees. Besides the atrocities committed against the civilian population in Macedonia, the most significant impact of the uprising was the loss of so many great IMRO leaders.

Despite the negative attitudes of the European Governments, there was much press about the Ilinden rebellion. World opinion was generally sympathetic to the Macedonian cause and highly critical of the Ottoman atrocities. Emigrant Macedonians the world over bombarded the Western Press with scathing attacks on the British, French and Austrian governments for supporting Turkey, militarily and financially. Even emigrants as far as the United States, staged large rallies in support of the rebellion. In New York alone more than 100,000 gathered to show support.

A Chicago newspaper reported that a Macedonian regiment had formed in that city and was preparing to take part in the rebellion. Closer to home, south Slav Nations such as Slovenia and Vojvodina held public meetings in support of the Macedonian Revolution. Even the European press featured sympathetic headlines when covering the rebellion. "It was a bitter struggle between the tortured slaves fighting on masse, often without weapons, but on spirit alone, for

life and liberty; and the sadistic Pasha and his cohorts, murdering and plundering with rabidity." (Giorgio Nurigiani)

General Ettore Loddi, who was a member of the international police force headed by the well-known General DeGeorgis after the Ilinden uprising, had occasion to express his particular respect and admiration for the "immortal deeds" of Christo Uzunov. Uzunov was a native of Ohrid also a member of the IMRO Regional Committee of Bitola who committed suicide with his men in a fight with the army.

He said:

"I have personal knowledge of the martyrdom of your proud, fearless, tenacious people. I have lived among them for many years and think they are greater than the Christian martyrs. I am acquainted with your men and women. I have seen many deeds and examples of stoicism in your beautiful country.

In 1904, after the uprising, some of us Italian officers were sent to serve in Macedonia. We knew very little about the causes of the unrest and uprisings in this country, very little, too, about the comitadjis.

I was living in Ohrid. The whole district was in the hands of the Organization (IMRO). The name of Christo Uzunov, who on all sides seemed to be one of the most outstanding personalities in the district of Bitola after the uprising, was everywhere on the lips of Christians and Turks as a legend. To counter the Organization's activities, the Turks opened the doors wide to Greek and Serb propagandists and their armed bands. Thus there began a tremendous struggle for extermination among the Christians. We were pursuing humanitarian ends. So I had an idea and we decided to suggest to the outlaws that they should return to their homes, guaranteeing that they would not be persecuted. I was to begin with Uzunov. His mother was living at Struga. I asked for her to be sent for and she came to Ohrid to see me. She was in mourning. She had already lost a son in the struggle. I told her at once why I had sent for her. She listened to me attentively and after thanking me for what I wished to do for her family, she told me in firm, calm tones, worthy of a Roman matron, that her son would not accept my advice, for on leaving his father's house he had sworn not to cross the threshold again until his native land had been set free. Two weeks later, Uzunov's mother came to see me again. She told me that her son had written to her from the forest thanking me, but unfortunately he could not consider my advice, since he had gone to do his duty to his country.

In the following year, Uzunov met a much more heroic end than that of the Christian martyrs.

On the day after the fight, I saw in the village of Tser something terrible I shall never forget. Eleven bodies of young heroes, all with open wounds in their chests and foreheads. All had killed themselves to escape falling into the hands of the enemy. They showed me the voivoda. He was lying on the floor with his arms flung wide and his staring eyes gazing upwards into space. Blood was still trickling from his forehead.

This is what I shall never forget.

At that moment I saw Macedonia, a great, unconquerable martyr." (Giorgio Nurigiani)

British official policy however, was less than sympathetic. According to the Daily News, September 14, 1903, Prime Minister Balfour told the House of Commons "...the balance of criminality lies not with the Turks, but with the rebels." The paper was critical of this attitude and recorded the following editorial: "The balance of criminality is surely here in our own land. Britain had denied Macedonia freedom at Berlin, knowing that (continued) Ottoman rule was synonymous with cruelty and tyranny, and by adopting a laissez-faire attitude at the juncture, Britain is a consenting party to all the ghastly murders and massacres in Macedonia..." (Michael Radin)

While there was a public outcry in the streets regarding the treatment of Macedonians, the British Government cared less about Macedonia's suffering than about Bulgarian threats to their precious Ottoman Empire. Being weakened by the Macedonian rebellion, the thinking in London was that Turkey was now ripe for a Bulgarian invasion. Balfour used the Macedonian rebellion as a pretext to move Britain's Mediterranean Fleet into the Aegean Sea fearing that war between Bulgaria and Turkey was now inevitable.

At about the same time Greek-Turkish relations began to warm up. The souring relationship between Turkey and Bulgaria was seen as a new opportunity by Greece to accelerate her influence inside Macedonia. Making her way to Turkey, Greece had to first prop up her cool relations with Germany. Her first attempt was initiated by inviting German help to re-organize the Greek military. After that, Greece began to grant industrial and commercial favours to German businessmen including the re-organization of the Greek telegraph.

The Turks on the other hand were looking for allies. The loss of Ottoman Crete to the Greeks was only a bruise to the Turkish ego, so the Turks were willing to forgive and forget. Losing Macedonia however, was serious business, and bolstering the friendship with Greece was one way of staving off Bulgarian advances.

To preserve whatever they could from a failing rebellion, IMRO turned its attention to diplomacy. In September 1903, Pere Toshev of IMRO took a trip to Tsari Grad to elicit some guarantees from official representatives of the Super Powers. Toshev's only request was to have a Christian governor to govern Macedonia. Unfortunately, his request was rejected in favour of the status quo. Later however, when statistics of Turkish atrocities started pouring in, the Super Power attitude softened a little. In October, the Super Powers re-considered Toshev's request but instead of appointing a Christian governor each nation agreed to send a small "peace-keeping" force. This did not help the Macedonian position at all. In fact it hindered IMRO's self-defense initiatives even against Bashi-bazouk attacks.

Turkish atrocities committed against the Macedonian villages, in the eyes of the world, created bad publicity for Turkey and for her allies the Western Powers. As a result Turkish popularity started to decline and so did Turkey's favour with the Super Powers. Being financially strapped and having her hands tied, Turkey turned to her neighbours for assistance. By declaring Macedonia a "multi-interest-zone" and inviting armed propaganda from Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia to counter the IMRO insurgency, Turkey was hoping to turn the tide of the rebellion in her favour. Again, Super Power inaction put Macedonia and the Macedonian people in peril.

At the end of August, after the fall of Krushevo, Nasir Pasha was appointed to take command from Omar Rushdi Pasha. Rushdi was blamed for the flare-up of the rebellion and Nasir was chosen to put an end to it. Nasir Pasha was a favourite of the Sultan, spoke German, and was considered civilized by many who had high hopes for a quick end to the rebellion. Unfortunately, Nasir's plans involved the burning of ALL villages involved in the revolts and quickly rounding up the people involved. He certainly had the "right men" with the "right courage" to execute such a barbaric plan. Unfortunately, Nasir Pasha's plan did not involve pursuing the Cheti. "...the regiments which should have been pursuing the Insurgents found it more agreeable and interesting to pillage the defenseless villagers and make war on the women and children." (Brailsford) Nasir Pasha's strategy forced IMRO and the Cheti to rethink their plans and change their tactics. Henceforth, organized Cheti attacks on the Turks subsided and the Cheti regrouped to take up defensive positions. Concerned for their families and villages some of the Cheti disbanded and returned to defend their own homes. After that, fighting became disorderly and on November 2nd, 1903 the insurrection was declared at an end.

According to Brailsford, the Cheti fought about 150 battles in total with 746 casualties, which amounted to about 15 % of the total fighting force. In most of these encounters the Cheti were outnumbered by at least 10 Turks to 1 Macedonian. Before it was all over, the Turks were attacking everywhere, even

in secluded areas that once were beyond militia reach. To save themselves, many civilians resorted to camping among the fighters and even following them in wild battles. Their only safety was to be with the Cheti. "...sometimes the battle raged about the lair where the women and children lay, the men fighting with all their manhood to defend some shallow trench, knowing that behind them covered wife and child expecting massacre if their courage failed or their bullets missed the mark." (Brailsford)

Before I finish with the Ilinden uprising I want to mention that even though not much action was seen in Eastern Macedonia, the Endrene (Macedonian Dardanelles or Andrianople) region had also risen in 1903 to join the Macedonian rebellion. This forgotten region, that once ruled the world, belonged to Macedonia at one point in time because Macedonians to this day still live there. What the world calls Pomac (converts from Christianity to Islam) Bulgarians, are in fact Macedonians who converted to Islam. It is believed that the Christians of Endrene initiated the revolt but could not sustain it for too long due to the numerical superiority of the Muslim militia and the fact that the region was without mountains and there were no places to hide.

The IMRO leaders that survived the rebellion responded decisively to the new crisis by establishing temporary centers to distribute urgently needed food and medical supplies to the displaced population. While doing that, they were also fighting a political battle with the Vrhovists for control of IMRO itself. The Bulgarians had dispatched assassins to eliminate the "old guard" but the legendary Yane Sandanski and his Cheta remained active and fought back fearlessly. When word got out that Sandanski was still active he gained a large following and was able to successfully repel all the assassination attempts. As the most able military strategist of the revolution, Sandanski was a natural successor to Delchev.

"The young women fared the worst, for, when the troops (Turks) could catch them, they were often carried off to the Turkish camps and there kept for some days until the last brute who desired them had had his will." (Brailsford) Many of these young girls who survived returned to their village but instead of finding a home they found abandoned ruins and again fell prey to prowling soldiers or marauding Bashi-bazouks.

The Ilinden rebellion had no happy ending for Macedonia. The Macedonian people lost their bid for freedom and paid the ultimate price. Henry Brailsford in his book "Macedonia its Races and their Future" describes the Ilinden aftermath in some detail by providing specific accounts of some of the worst horrors perpetrated. Brailsford was an aid worker inside Macedonia during the conflict and witnessed some of the accounts he described in his book.



The Macedonian rebellion did not succeed because there were too many factors working against it. The Macedonian people showed will and determination and rose to the task in spite of all odds. Compared to the Serbian, Greek, and Bulgarian rebellions, the Macedonians were the most determined, well organized, and most desperate. But they were not ready. The Serbians, Greeks, and Bulgarians had only one enemy, the Turks, and received a lot of help from friends in high places (the Super Powers). In contrast no one, beyond the Macedonians wanted the Macedonians to succeed. The Greeks and especially the Bulgarians went out of their way to create obstacles. The Super Powers, believing that they had nothing to gain, also abstained from helping Macedonia. The Serbian, Greek, and Bulgarian struggles for independence prepared the Turks and made them stronger and more determined to deal with the Macedonians.

When the conflict was over, the people who returned to their villages were devastated to find their homes destroyed. On top of all their ills, winter was fast approaching and no food or shelter was to be found. "The villages were mere heaps of charred wood and blackened stone, buried beneath a red dust which the rain converted to mud. A few walls still stood upright, the only hope for the winter." (Brailsford) To make matters worse, a curfew was placed on travel and those away from home found themselves stranded. Those in need of work were no longer allowed to leave their vilayets. This was the first time in Macedonian history that Macedonians ever considered permanent emigration. Many early Macedonian emigrants to Canada, the USA and Australia were refugees from the Ilinden aftermath.

O Makedonio,  
I am getting tired and weary,  
When will I toast to your freedom,  
Will it be in my lifetime?  
When will I dance to your native timeless OROs,  
Will it be in the next decade?  
When will I speak the language my mother taught me,  
Will it be sometime soon?  
O Makedonio,  
How much longer do I have to wait?

Risto Stefov

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