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Position of the European Free Alliance (EFA) on the war in Iraq as agreed on 20/3/2003

European Free Alliance Members Condemn the Invasion of Iraq

Joint Statement from the European Free Alliance (EFA) Members of the European Parliament

Brussels, 20/3/2003

European Free Alliance (EFA) members of the European Parliament condemn the decision of the United States and her allies to wage war with Iraq. EFA MEPs have voiced their dire concern at the potential humanitarian catastrophe that could be caused by war in Iraq.

EFA members agreed on the following joint statement:

“We condemn the decision of the United States and her allies to wage war with Iraq. This conflict is both unnecessary and unjustified and we fear a humanitarian catastrophe on a grand scale.

Our thoughts are with the civilian population of Iraq – men, women and children whose lives have been put at risk by this unjustifiable use of force.

We also think of the service men and women sent to the front whose lives are also put at risk by the reckless warmongering of their political leaders.

This is an illegal war, carried out without UN backing. The weapons inspections regime has begun to bring about the peaceful disarmament of Iraq. The United States should heed the advice of the international community, expressed through the UN, and allow the weapons inspectors to disarm Iraq peacefully, avoiding needless bloodshed.”

OPEN LETTER

Dr. George Nakratzas

Author

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**To the Right Honorable
Konstantinos Simitis
Prime Minister of Greece
Athens**

Rotterdam, 25 February 2003

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

The Macedonian Human Rights Movement of Canada has reported that three Canadian nationals of Macedonian descent were denied entry to Greece last year. The latest incident occurred on 30 May 2002 when entry to Greece was refused to Mr. Mendo Petrefski, a Canadian national of Macedonian descent.

When the Canadian Embassy in Athens brought the case to the Greek authorities, their response was that nothing could be done because Mr. Petrefski did not have documents from the Niki border post and further because he did not know the name of the border official involved in the decision.

If this accusation is true, then the Greek government's official response to the Canadian Embassy in Athens does little credit to our country, the country currently holding the European Union Presidency.

The Greek authorities surely know the identity of the official on duty at the Niki border post on 30 May 2002.

The fact that the Canadian national had no document explaining why he was regarded as *persona non grata* in Greece is entirely due to the failings of our local authorities. Here, as in all such instances, the necessary stamp should have been put directly into the holder's Canadian passport.

Sir, no self-respecting country insults a tourist on the grounds that he or she has a suspicious record without providing concrete evidence to this effect, or at the very least communicating these grounds to the person in question.

In truth, Mr. Prime Minister, facts of the case are somewhat different.

It is well known that all EU country border posts keep a list of persons whose entry is deemed undesirable. The names on this list, however, are those of persons known to have committed criminal acts.

There are claims – though I have no certain knowledge of this – that Greek border posts keep a second, unofficial list of names of persons whose entry to the country is barred for purely political reasons. Moreover, this list is said to contain only the names of those persons who declare themselves to be ethnic Macedonians.

A similar incident in the relatively recent past involved a Mr. Karatzas, a 78-year-old resident of the Republic of Macedonia, who was refused entry to Greece. It was only after international protests and because of your own very sensible intervention, that this elderly gentleman, a veteran of the Democratic Army, was finally allowed to visit his childhood village near Kastoria for the last time. I was greatly relieved when Mr. Karatzas himself informed me of his visit.

Mr. Prime Minister hasn't the time finally come to abolish this alleged second unofficial list that classifies ethnic Macedonians personae non gratae?

With all due respect I ask you to imagine how we Greeks would react if we were denied entry at the border post of a neighboring country because we declared ourselves ethnic Greeks.

Very truly yours,
Dr. George Nakratzas

PS: Permit me to inform you that a copy of this letter in English translation will be forwarded to each of the 600 members of the European Parliament and to other interested parties.

Autopsy of an Autopsy

In its program "Autopsy," aired Saturday 8/2/2003, ALPHA television presented a feature on Lake Doirani (Macedonian: Dojran) on the Greek/Macedonian border. The report focused on the ecological degradation suffered by the lake over recent years. The feature was shown again that same evening on ALPHA's main news broadcast. This is not unusual since the so-called "main" news broadcasts often fill up time with either rebroadcasts of clips from other programs or with previews of what will be shown the next day (so as not to keep us in suspense!). Personally, I'm not a big fan of television but I because I was bedridden in hospital at the time I happened to see this particular show.

Being a biologist I found what I heard about the destruction of the lake's ecosystem interesting, albeit very sad. But I won't dwell on the subject of ecology since the report was not purely ecological. On the contrary, it had certain political dimensions. The reporter told us among other quips that the lake was the conceptual border between

Greece and Skopje and that everyday Greek and “Skopjan” fisherman encounter one another on the job. My first thought was: “Now, how many Skopjans go on fishing trips to Lake Doirani! Isn’t it a bit far away? Or, perhaps as part of the, say, decentralization program and because of the unemployment plaguing the neighboring country, some residents of Skopje have left their towns to settle in the villages around the lake, and now earn their living as fishermen?!” Fortunately, my conundrum was soon solved. I suddenly recalled that many of my compatriots call “Skopjan” anything from the Republic of Macedonia (the language, the country’s citizens, etc).

But the most interesting part of the feature was when they showed two fisherman (one from each country) having a chat in some “unspecified” language about which the reporter made no comment whatsoever. (Of course, all they while they were talking we heard the reporter’s voice-over; the voices were still audible but the conversation was incomprehensible. Why was that, I wonder?) The reporter did say of course that the two men were having a conversation, but he didn’t clarify in what language they were communicating. At one point in fact, the Greek fisherman acted as interpreter for the reporter. When the “Skopjan” fisherman was asked how things were going, he answered, “*shiromastenie*.” “Poverty,” the Greek fisherman explained to the reporter. Now this writer, apparently a person of low I.Q., could not understand it was possible for a Greek fisherman from Doirani to know the language of his so-called Skopjan colleague! Had the Greek studied at some educational institution in our neighbor country? Had he perhaps taken a course in “Skopjan” here in Greece? Or maybe did he learn it for reasons of tourism? To find out those answers I obviously must ask the reporter himself!

Seriously, however, certain things must be clarified so that we can avoid similar “misunderstandings” and misinterpretations:

a) Whether we like it or not, one of our neighboring countries is the Republic of Macedonia. Skopje is simply the capital of this country, which for many years now has been an independent state. The residents of the villages of Star Dojran, Strugas or any other city and village of this country are no more Skopjans than the residents of Rethymnon or Lamia are Athenians!

b) Also whether we like it or not, there are still many citizens of the Hellenic Republic who have been living for many years on their native soil and who speak the Macedonian language. Many first spoke it as children despite the harsh governmental persecutions of the past.¹ Of course, as they were never given the opportunity to learn the official/literary form of the language, they speak the local dialects of their region (Kastorias, Aridaias, Eordias, etc). However, They do not speak either “Skopjan” or Bulgarian (the latter was the fashionable term in the past, the former is the fashionable one these days!). What they do speak is the Macedonian language, the existence of which has been adequately confirmed by experts in the field. Naturally, as linguists and anthropologists explain, there is indeed a Skopjan dialect, just as there are authentic Skopjans – native inhabitants of the city of Skopje – as opposed to internal

¹ Details can be found in the excellent book, *The Forbidden Language*, by T. Kostopoulos, which provides an in-depth analysis of the suppression of the use of the Macedonian language.

migrants or political refugees. But from personal experience I know that, besides official Macedonian, genuine Skopjans speak a dialect strongly influenced by Serbian and entirely different from the one spoken in the villages of Doirani or Florina. Moreover, a Macedonian from Greece and someone speaking “Skopjan” dialect would have considerable difficulty understanding one another in a conversation.² The same is true for native Skopjans, to whom the dialects of Aegean Macedonia are quite incomprehensible.³ Wouldn’t the same thing happen in a conversation between a genuine Athenian (though there aren’t so many), or even a child born and raised in Athens, and someone who was speaking in the local idiom of the Arcadian mountains in the Peloponnese or a Cycladic island?

Dear readers, for the conclusion of my autopsy of the homonymous television program I have chosen to paraphrase the Bible: A word to the wise! The time has come to awaken dear friends and countrymen from our chauvinistic apathy, seeing that we now hold the European Union Presidency.

Panayiotis Somalis
Athens

<p style="text-align: center;">FUGITIVE CHILDREN (Detsa begaltsi)</p>

Petros G. Votsis

A woman is walking rapidly in the direction of the village cemetery. She’s around 50 and her stride is even and determined. She seems to know her way around. Two men are following behind her with the same pace and determination. The woman opens the iron gate, looks both ways as if searching for a landmark or to get her bearings, and continues walking confidently towards the center. The men follow the same route. Suddenly they realize that all three of them are in the same place, within a hair’s breath of one another. All three are looking for something among the gray tombstones. They make eye contact. Each of them recognizes something in the gaze of the two men, and this thought startles all three. The woman utters the words, “maika mi” (my mother). The two men repeat the phrase and with tears in their eyes and sobs in their throats cry out “Iana”! The woman cries “Laze, Leskos”! They collapse in an embrace on the stone slabs that form the burial site. The three bodies quake in a mass of emotion on top of the grave. The vertical gray tombstones seem to stand upright as though awakening from a long deep sleep. It’s as if they are rising to their full height to look around and understand what was happening by the tangle of people who are alternately wailing and babbling in three languages and gazing insatiably into one another’s eyes.

² As told to me by political refugees from villages of Aegean Macedonia who settled in Skopje after the Greek Civil War.

³ A friend of mine who comes from many generations of Skopjans encountered considerable difficulty particularly with some grammatical forms in reading P. Koufis, *Folktales of Florina – Kastoria*.

We had heard that the children of the fugitives of the Greek Civil War and the *paidomazoma* [=gathering up of children]⁴ were coming to our village. Some of us had seen the news on television and others corroborated it, having read about it in the papers: the “children” wouldn’t just be coming to our village but to all of Macedonia. Some people remarked, “What are they coming for, to see our pitiful lives? Aren’t they happy where they are?” Others said, “They’re after our property, which of course once belonged to their parents, but the state gave it to us. We have papers to prove it, we own the titles.” Others were outraged because some papers wrote that “those coming are separatists and want our Macedonia. They’ll make one state together with Skopje.” “Yeah,” the level-headed ones said, “they’ll come in helicopters, load Macedonia on board, and move it north. Let the kids come and see where their umbilical cords were cut – the ones who were born here. Let them see where their parents lived, where their graves of their ancestors are. Let them finally see where they came from. Listen people, haven’t you ever heard of homesickness, of the longing to see one’s birthplace? Besides most of them are our kin. Aren’t you even curious to see them? And don’t think they’ll be children or anything like that. Most of them are over 50. Don’t forget, it was 1948 when we wiped them out.”

In the village café the talk went on and on. Some folks got letters, others phone calls. After a while the news that shook us up so much at first was assessed more carefully. The comments became more positive: “Anyway, they’re our kids, our relatives, our cousins, our brothers and sisters even,” concluded almost everyone. Someone even proposed that we give them a welcome: “Well why not, after all they’re our kin aren’t they?”

The news was embellished with phone calls and letters. We learned that the “children” would be coming from various countries, even from Australia and Canada. The youngsters were asking how there could possibly be people all over the world from our little village. “Our village, Setina, Skopos as it’s called now,” the oldest and most knowledgeable said, “was once a large village. Together with Papadia, Kalyvia and the other settlements of Kaimaktsalan it had almost 2000 inhabitants. All the pastures around here were fields sown with rye. Our fellow villagers kept thousands of sheep and cows. In the summer they hired two community field wardens to make sure no damage was done to the fields. They rotated the crop with pastureland. When one side was sown, the other was used for grazing and vice versa. We all had fields and pens on both sides.

This anticipated visit enlivened the discussions about our village and its history, and rekindled memories.

The day the “children” were to come was the summer St. Nicholas Day (May 20th), our local feast day.

Slowly, cautiously, one by one, the people started entering our little Church of Ai-Nikolas. The holy services had begun. They searched each other’s eyes in the eyes more

⁴ When the Greek Army decimated the Communist strongholds in the mountains of northern Greece at the end of 1947, the children were rounded up and taken over the border by the surviving guerillas or placed in orphanages by the Royal Welfare Society.

than they gazed at the icons. Perhaps they were hoping that some gaze would remind them of something or that they might recognize someone. With respect and a bit of unease they lit their candles in the candelabrum, crossed themselves. Some kissed the icons, perhaps with a prayer or a blessing. The little church soon filled up and most folk had to stand outside. Many came furnished with still and video cameras.

In the churchyard tables were set with places for all, especially for the guests. We all wanted to show our hospitality to the visitors, many of whom had stayed in the guestrooms of Ai-Nikolas when they were little.

Ai-Nikolas had long provided shelter for transients and laborers in the area, especially during sudden downpours. Now as then, the church has always received its income from donations.

Having found their relatives, the “children” had broken up into smaller groups and were chatting and taking pictures and videos. Of course, there were emotional scenes too, such as when some grandma found a grandchild or great-grandchild. Some of the “children” found it hard to communicate. They did not know Greek and had forgotten their mother tongue, Macedonian. Those from Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Canada, Australia and elsewhere had trouble conversing and their participation was confined to names, smiles, nods and gestures. Sometimes they enlisted the help of interpreters. Although some of the dishes were strange to them, they enjoyed the food of their birthplace and expressed their pleasure.

Having eaten their fill, they boarded a bus and set off for the village. There, they scattered to take pictures and videos of the ruins that might once have been their homes. Some even picked up a stone or roof tile to take back with them. The village came alive.

I invited one group to my home for a drink (*na rakia*). We sat on the veranda. I asked them what they would like; some asked for coffee but most preferred the local alcohol, *raki*.

They asked many questions and I answered as best I could. After all, we were all around the same age; I didn't know the villagers who fled and they didn't know the ones who stayed behind. Here and there, however, there were some families with members, so we found things in common. I was struck by the fact that even though fifty years had passed they had certain indelible images engraved in their memories. They knew Kaimaktsalan, Visima and all the mountains around the village. They remembered the river and some looked for particular trees or rocks throughout the village. The atmosphere shifted from tears to laughter and back again.

Many times they pressed me for details I didn't know, such as where their fields were, how many animals they had, which house was theirs and so forth. I reminded them that we are contemporaries and that I really don't know any more than they do about life before the Civil War.

Suddenly, we heard strange cries coming from the village cemetery, which is near my house. We heard cries of desperation along with sobbing. We couldn't imagine what was going on. Curious and worried that something bad might be happening, several in the group got up and went over there. They soon returned with three people, a woman and two men walking arm-in-arm, constantly changing places with each other. They kept trying to converse but their sobs prevented it. They joined us on the veranda and asked for some water.

I had noticed these people at Ai-Nikolas and now regarding them closely I could see a strong resemblance. The strangest part was that they could only communicate with each other through an interpreter. Fortunately, the "children" were from many countries and spoke a spectrum of languages.

After the initial excitement died down, they began telling their story, which we understood more through their body language than what the translators related. Leskos, who was the eldest, helped us with our Macedonian, which he knew quite well since he was taught our language in what was Czechoslovakia.

For all three, their memories of the village began and ended with the funeral and gravesite of their mother.

Their mother died in childbirth when Iana was four, Leskos eight, and Lazos six. Iana, who is now a doctor, explained that the dead fetus she was carrying was most likely the cause of their mother's death. The blood type was incompatible and she, Iana, had discovered she had same trait. Their father was a Communist guerilla who was killed in the fierce fighting on Mount Vitsi in Northern Greece. After their mother died they went to live with their grandmother. For months the three children made daily visits to their mother's gravesite. It had become almost a game to them and they never forgot the location of the grave.

Then came the *paidomazoma* [see note 4] by the Communists in what the Democratic Army called "free zones." Elsewhere, where the National Army was in control, they were taken by the Royal Welfare Society and placed in orphanages.

The grandmother gave up all three children in one batch. First, because she believed that they would be safer away from the brutal fighting of the civil war, and, second, because she was promised that they would be cared for and educated. The three siblings stayed together all the way to the border, frequently carrying little Iana in their arms. At the border they were received by a special mission from the Socialist Republics and the first separation took place. It was there that the boys were separated from the girls. Iana was finally taken to Hungary where she initially stayed in various orphanages. In the mid-50s the displaced children were asked if they had any relatives in other socialist countries who would take them in. Iana had no idea if she had any relatives or where they might be. She remained "unclaimed" and a Hungarian family offered to adopt her. The couple was childless and they raised Iana, who they renamed Emma, as their own. She studied medicine, married and had children. Still, she never forgot her mother's gravesite and her

two brothers. When she read the invitation to the “fugitive children” to visit their birthplace she responded. She had no problems at the border because of her Hungarian passport and name.

Lazos, the second child, caught the mumps along the way and was placed in a Yugoslavian hospital, which is how he and Leskos came to be separated. When he recovered he was taken to Romania where he finished high school. He managed to immigrate to Canada and became a Canadian citizen under the name John Lazos. He became a successful automobile mechanic and got married. The couple was unable to have children and he was told that it was a result of the mumps he caught on the trip through Yugoslavia. When he heard about the invitation to the “children” he eagerly signed up. And now he was here with his brother and sister, realizing a wish he’d always cherished deep down.

Leskos found himself in Czechoslovakia with other Greek children. Being the eldest he remembered his first and last name and thus kept them. He even remembered the name of his village and designated it as his place of birth when he became a Czechoslovakian citizen. He never dreamt that knowing one’s name and place of birth could create problems. Since the name of the village had been changed, the consular authorities believed that there was no such village in Greece. After much difficulty he managed to get a visa, but that didn’t save him the ordeal of being held up at the border for hours while his papers were being verified.

The sun began to set and, huddling close to each other, the three siblings began to speak of their children, their homes and their lives. The beautiful day in May was the perfect setting for a happy and entirely unexpected reunion. This was something beyond their wildest dreams.

The “children” came home, but most of them saw nothing of what they remembered. The only things that remained unchanged were the churches, the cemetery and the surrounding mountains. Some of them left embittered and disgusted by the attitudes of some of the transplanted inhabitants and new landlords who did not allow them to enter their homes in the village of their birth. Still, they bid us farewell and promised to come back again. As we watched them board the bus we felt pangs of guilt for being able to live in our homeland while they had become foreign visitors in their own country.

February 2003

Greeks: Patriots or Nationalists?

Poll shows that Greeks are first in patriotic sentiment

ALEXIS HERAKLIDES

A recently published poll of 90,000 high school students in twenty-eight countries showed that Greeks lead in patriotic sentiment, with Greek Cypriots in second place (see article in the daily *Ta Nea*, 11/12/2002, p. 16). This matter is particularly timely given

that, in the wake of Copenhagen, the solution to the Cyprus issue and the fate of the island hangs by a thread.

It is true that Greeks are more ethnocentric than the citizens of other countries are? Perhaps the patriotism mentioned here means something else: simply loving and having pride in Greece as a country and state? After all, patriotism is distinguished from nationalism (i.e. the love of one's nation, which occasionally turns extreme and/or belligerent). Patriotism is the devotion/love/identification with a state, not with a nation/ethnos. Nevertheless, if a state is a national state, like Greece is, the boundaries between state and nation are indistinguishable.

The distinction between patriotism and nationalism becomes clearer when (a) the devotion/identification is with a state whose society is multiethnic, and this identification is contrary to or transcends the nationalism of individual ethnic groups. The second distinction comes when one can distinguish between state nationalism and pan-nationalism, such as in 19th century Greece (tiny Greece in contradistinction with the *Megali Idea* or Great Idea). This also holds true in the Arab world where there is a conceptual distinction between the devotion to one particular Arab state and the identification with the greater Arab nation. It should be noted that the overwhelming majority of states today are not national states or nation-states, even if they insist that they are, as with Turkey or Israel or the reunified Cyprus as the Greeks and Greek Cypriots rejectionists would have it.

Another problem in distinguishing patriotism from nationalism dates from the time that nationalism and the notion of nation made its first appearance in the late-18th century. This is that the two notions frequently are used synonymously.

The intense ethnocentrism of the Greeks is known from other polls as well (see, e.g., Fragoudaki & Dragonas, editors, "What is our country? Ethnocentrism in education", 1997). But the context of these studies was not comparative. It should also be noted that Greeks are renowned internationally – especially in Europe and neighboring countries like Turkey – for being ethnocentric and nationalistic.

What causes this privilege of ethnocentrism and, possibly, nationalism? I believe there are two roots: (1) Greek education, particularly the history books that are so ethnocentric that Greek pupils are convinced that they belong to a "chosen people" who all others envy and conspire against, and (2) to the very nature of the Greek national identity.

The fact that Greek schoolchildren are truly intense patriots and nationalistic (as seen year after year in the Youth Parliament) has another unpleasant side effect. As adults they rarely change their opinions. They lack the time to study and perceive that Greeks are not superior and all others inferior. Of course, to see oneself as superior is psychologically satisfying. However, in when it comes to positions of responsibility, especially in politics, this mentality always leads to a dead-end, to error, and to disillusion.

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