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**The members of IMARO and IMRO and the Bulgarian administration of
Vardar Macedonia (1941-1944)**

ABSTRACT

of a dissertation for awarding an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 2.2 History and Archaeology. Doctoral program "History of Bulgaria" - New Bulgarian History 1878-1944

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Sofia

2025

The dissertation was discussed and proposed for defense on December 17, 2024 by the "History of Bulgaria" Department at the Faculty of History in Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The text consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, appendices and a bibliography – a total of 314 pages.

I. General characteristics of the dissertation work

Understanding the role that the activists of the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (IMARO) and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) had during the Bulgarian administration of Vardar Macedonia in 1941-1944 is essential for several reasons. First of all, this will allow us to better understand their ideas and attitude towards the Bulgarian state in this new situation. During these war years, the essence and national character of their activities became very evident. The significance of the Macedonian question in Bulgarian history determines the need for academic research of all its aspects, including the topic of the present work. At the same time, the positions of the former members of the Internal Organization in 1941-1944 are subject to dispute and misinterpretation in the historiography of official Skopje. The collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941 brings new solutions to the Macedonian question and confronts the Bulgarian state leadership with a historic mission and challenges, requiring statesmanlike and far-sighted decisions in these military times.

The object of study, as indicated in the very title of the dissertation, are the figures of the Internal Organization in the two main periods of its existence (before and after the wars of 1912-1918), with the study focusing on the time of Bulgarian administration of Vardar Macedonia.

The main subject of the study is the relations between the activists of the IMARO and IMRO with the Bulgarian authorities during the Bulgarian administration from April 1941 to September 1944.

The research was carried out through comparative and geopolitical analysis, the main method being thematic-chronological analysis and historical synthesis.

Objectives and Research Tasks

The main objective is to determine whether the members of IMARO from the Ottoman period (before the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913) had different understandings and positions from the members of IMRO active after World War I regarding the national character of the population in Macedonia, the solution of the "Macedonian question," and the idea of a United Bulgaria. The study examines how the activists of the Internal Organization perceived Bulgarian administration

during these nearly three and a half years and what changes the new Bulgarian government brought to their lives.

This task requires a thorough review of published sources from the period and extensive research in Bulgarian archives, which contain abundant materials on the years of Bulgarian administration in Vardar Macedonia.

The dissertation also explores the fate of the Internal Organization members following the annexation of Bulgarian-populated lands, including Vardar Macedonia. Were they collaborators of the Bulgarian authorities, and did they view Bulgarian administration as liberation? What were the differences in attitude toward Bulgarian governing among IMARO members from the Ottoman period and those from IMRO (1919-1934)? Did veterans from the Ottoman period share the same views as IMRO members and Ivan Mihailov? The study aims to reveal the fate and positions of Bulgarian revolutionaries in one of the most turbulent periods of recent history. During these years, their revolutionary spirit was revived, and they experienced long-awaited freedom.

Sources

The study uses archival sources from Bulgaria, Croatia, and North Macedonia.

The most valuable unpublished sources are housed in the Central State Archive (CSA) in Sofia, including records from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Health (1879-1944), the Police Archive, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religions (MFAR). The Military Historical Archive in Veliko Tarnovo also preserves materials concerning the Bulgarian administration and the situation in Vardar Macedonia. Documentary evidence about the Ilinden Organization and the Union of Macedonian -Adrianople Volunteer organization are used from the territorial state archives in Varna and Blagoevgrad.

Several funds of the Croatian State Archives (HDA) in Zagreb were used, which directly concern the topic of the study and describe the situation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and more precisely the "Vardarska Banovina", from the beginning of the thirties until the defeat of Yugoslavia in April 1941. The most important ones include the funds of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), the News or Information Department, the diplomatic mission of the NDH in Sofia, as well as the one on the "reactionary organizations of the regime", containing information about the resistance against the Yugoslav authorities.

From the State Archive of the Republic of North Macedonia – Bitola are used documents from archival funds: The Bitola Regional Directorate, the Ohrid-Bitola Metropolitanate, the Bitola Municipality and other institutions.

Various magazines and newspapers that were published at that time are studied: "Pelister Echo", "United Bulgaria", "Zora", "Zarya", "Utro", etc. Memories and diaries of public figures and leaders of the era were used and consulted, the most important of which are the diaries of Bogdan Filov and Nikola Stoyanov, the memories of Gen. Vasil Boydev, Mihail Ognyanov, Hristo Ognyanov, Ivan Mihaylov, the Bulgarian officer and regional governor of Bitola Sotir Naney, Metodi Yanchulev and others .

A very important source of useful information on the subject are the documentary collections, which mainly contain reports of diplomatic representatives, police functionaries and other officials. They testify to the situation in Vardar Macedonia, and some of them also to the activities of the IMRO members at that time. First of all, of the published sources, the most useful are those on the Bulgarian government in Vardar Macedonia (1941-1944) ¹and the collection of reports of the legation of the Independent State of Croatia in Sofia.²

Historiographical review

The dissertation provides a detailed review of the achievements and limitations and disadvantages of the historiography on the issue in Bulgaria, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Croatia.

In the historiography of Bulgaria from the so-called socialist period until 1989, the theme of the communist resistance against the Bulgarian state during the Second World War is predominantly exposed, and the Bulgarian administration in Macedonia is only briefly considered.

¹ **Grebenarov, A., Nikolova, N.** (comp .). Bulgarian Administration in Vardar Macedonia (1941-1944), Sofia: State Archives Agency, 2011.

² **Kolanović , N.** Poslanstvo NDH u Sofiji : diplomatski reports 1941-1945. Zagreb : HDA , 2003.

The Bulgarian troops in Macedonia are defined as “occupation”, and the unification of the Bulgarian lands during the war is presented as territorial claims of the “monarcho-fascists” who ruled the country. Ivan Mihaylov’s IMRO is categorically defined as a fascist organization. Bulgaria is defined as a satellite, headed by a monarcho-fascist government, that justifies the situation to which the country has been brought with the “realization of Bulgarian national ideals”.³

In later editions of the socialist period, it began to be written more objectively and to speak only of the "entry" of the Bulgarian army into these territories and that this was not accompanied by a recognition by Germany that these were lands that should belong to Bulgaria, as was the wish of the government of Bogdan Filov. A change in the narrative was already noticeable and it was categorically stated that after the occupation of Vardar Macedonia, Tsaribrod and Bosilegrad by Bulgarian troops in these areas, the national oppression to which the Bulgarian population was subjected had stopped. This was indicated as the main reason for the lack of anti-fascist resistance, especially at the beginning of Bulgarian governing. It was emphasized that the functionaries of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) had difficulty in establishing contact with the local Bulgarian population, who lived with the joy of the liquidation of the Serbian royal power and its accession to the fatherland.⁴

After the end of the communist regime, historians in the democratizing Republic of Bulgaria after 1990 began to write more freely. Interest was expressed in various aspects of the Bulgarian administration of Vardar Macedonia, but this topic remains only partially or not thoroughly studied. Several studies, articles and monographs have been published, in which in separate paragraphs the activity of the IMRO members during the Bulgarian governing is presented in a general manner. In these studies, the IMRO during the war is conditionally divided into two groups - one under the leadership of Ivan Mihaylov, and the other - represented by the members of the former Macedonian Youth Secret Revolutionary Organization (MMTRO) with leaders Dimitar

³ **Kyosev, D.** The Struggles of the Macedonian People for Liberation. Sofia: Narodna Prosveta, 1952, pp. 223-225; **Kyosev, D.** History of the Macedonian National Revolutionary Movement. Sofia: National Council of the Fatherland Front, 1954, pp. 526-528; **Hristov, H. , Hadzhinikolov, V.** et al. History of Bulgaria, vol. 3. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1964, pp. 194, 379, 416, 427, 522; **Toshkova, V.** Bulgaria and the Third Reich. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1975, pp. 60, 215, 220.

⁴ **Vassilev, K., Sirkov, D.** et al. History of the anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria 1939/1944, volume one. Sofia: Partizdat , 1976, pp. 138-139; **Andonov, K. Gornenski , N.** et al. History of the Patriotic War of Bulgaria 1944-1945 – volume one. Sofia: Military Publishing House, 1981, pp. 95, 106.

Chkatrov and Dimitar Gyuzelev. The Bulgarian rule is presented as the liberation of the Bulgarian people in Vardar Macedonia from the Serbian denationalizing regime. It is indicated that the establishment of Bulgarian military-administrative power is supported by the Bulgarians in Vardar Macedonia and is seen as a positive step towards the integration of the region into the Bulgarian state. Special attention is paid to the fact that large sums of money have been invested in the economic development of the region and a series of measures have been taken to improve the lives of the population, including the provision of state aid in the form of food and other food products. The activities of the IMRO and MMTRO have also been analyzed, and the disapproval of their members with some aspects of the policies of the Bulgarian government has not been overlooked. The disapproval is mainly focused on the insufficient inclusion of local Bulgarians in the governance of the region, and the senior management personnel such as regional directors and police chiefs are mainly from the old borders of Bulgaria. The monitoring of former activists of the Internal Organization by the State Security Service of the Kingdom of Bulgaria has also been noted, due to the concerns that the officials have about the rumors and initiatives for autonomy for Vardar Macedonia. It has not been fully researched and clarified what is meant by autonomy in the views of Ivan Mihaylov's IMRO and the relations between the two groups of representatives of the Bulgarian national resistance during the Serbian regime have not been fully clarified. The role of Ivan Mihaylov at that time is partly not accurately presented, emphasizing his reservations towards the Bulgarian government and politics in those years and his contacts with official representatives of the Third Reich.⁵

In the historiography of the Republic of North Macedonia, the issue of the activists of the Internal Organization during the war has also been addressed in several studies dedicated to the Bulgarian administration (1941-1944). Highlight is given mainly to the role of the IMRO of Ivan

⁵ **Michev, D., Gotsev, D.** et al. Ivan Mihaylov and the National Liberation Movement of the Macedonian Bulgarians (100 Years of His Birth). – *Macedonian Review* , 1996, No. 3, 29-35; **D. Gotsev, Daskalov, G.** et al. Macedonia. History and Political Destiny. Volume 3, Sofia, 1998, pp. 48-58; **Michev, D., Germanov S.** et al. The National Liberation Movement of the Macedonian and Thracian Bulgarians 1878 – 1944 - Vol. 4, Sofia, 2003, pp. 373-381; **Hadzhiyski, I.** The Second Bulgarian Government in Vardar Macedonia (April 1941 – September 1944). Dupnitsa, 2016, pp. 157-174; **Todorov, K.** The Hero of Prilep Yordan Chkatrov . Blagoevgrad: Irin Pirin, 2015; **Tsarnushanov , K.** Contribution to history The Macedonian Youth Secret Revolutionary Organization. Sofia: MNI, 1996, pp. 413-440; **Tsarnushanov , K.** Macedonianism and Macedonia's resistance against it. Sofia: UI "St. Kliment Ohridski", 1992, pp. 213-230; **Micheva, T.** The idea of the IMRO for an autonomous (independent) Macedonia during the united Bulgaria (1941-1944). In: The National Unification of Bulgaria (1940-1944). Sofia: MNI, 2012, pp. 347, 351. (comp . **Grebenarov, A. Mitev, T.** et al.)

Mihaylov and the IMRO group Chkatrov - Gyuzelev. The governing itself is seen as an occupation regime, in which ethnic Macedonians are subjected to a strong denationalizing Bulgarian policy, aimed at making Bulgarians out of the centuries-old Macedonian people and stealing their history. The members of the IMRO are seen as an element that collaborates with the new occupiers - "Germans and Bulgarians", and is an enemy of the National Liberation Movement of the "Macedonian people". In general, the group around Dimitar Chkatrov and Dimitar Gyuzelev is said to advocate the annexation of the entire historical and geographical region of Macedonia to the Bulgarian state, because they believe that the Macedonian nation does not exist and therefore there should be no Macedonian state. They also write that the group led by Chkatrov - Gyuzelev continues its struggle from the period between the two world wars, when it advocated improving the situation of the "Bulgarian nationality" in the Kingdom of Serbs , Croats and Slovenes. The Chkatrov - Gyuzelev group accepted the annexation of Vardar Macedonia to Bulgaria, but was not satisfied with the policy pursued by the Bulgarian government, which did not sufficiently respect their merits for the struggle against the Greater Serbian regime. It is also stated that the Chkatrov - Gyuzelev group was against sending citizens from the old borders of Bulgaria to leadership positions in Vardar Macedonia, and on the contrary, the MMTRO activists, should govern Vardar Macedonia, lead the fight against the partisan movement and thus consolidate Bulgarian power. In a political sense, they are advocates for the regional autonomy of Vardar Macedonia within the Bulgarian state. For the group led by Ivan Mihaylov, or the "Mihaylovists", it is written that they work towards being closer to the Third Reich. Ivan Mihaylov is presented as an agent of Sofia, Berlin and Rome, and all three centers use him according to their needs.⁶

More recently, two biographies have been published, dedicated to Anastas Lozanchev , a member of the General Staff of the Ilinden Uprising and head of the IMARO in the Bitola Revolutionary District, and to Kiril Drangov, one of the leaders of the IMRO after 1924.⁷ Except

⁶ **Terzioski , R.** The denationalizing activity of the Bulgarian cultural and educational institutions in Macedonia . Skopje , 1974; **Terzioski , R.** Cooperation of IMRO- Mikhailovists with German occupier 1941-1944 - Messenger Revue . Year 18, no. 3, 1974, p. 31-52; **Stojchev V.** Bulgarian Occupying System in Macedonia 1941-1944", Skopje, 1996; **Terzioski , R.** The occupation of Macedonia (1941-1944). Skopje , 2011; **Veljanovski , N.** etc. History of the Macedonian people. T. 5, Macedonia in the Second World War , People's Liberation anti-fascist War in Macedonia : (1941-1945). Skopje 2003; **Malkovski , F.** Political parties and organizations in Macedonia during the Second World War (1941-1944). Skopje , INI, 2002.

⁷ **Gjorgiev, V.** Anastas Lozanchev. Skopje: Faculty of Philosophy, 2014, pp. 237-255 ; **Zhezhov , N.** Under the oath of IMRO. Kiril Drangov. Skopje, 2021, pp. 143 -166.

for An. Lozanchev, in Republic of North Macedonia there is no in-depth study for the activity of IMARO members in 1941-1944 period. The implication prevails in the publications that these revolutionaries were ethnic Macedonians and as such fought for Macedonia, but at certain periods of their lives, due to various circumstances, consciously or not, they worked in the service of Bulgarian propaganda. “The Ilindenci”, as the members of the IMARO are sometimes called from the period around the The Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising and until 1908/1912, are considered by the historiography of the Republic of North Macedonia to be fighters for an independent state of the Macedonian people, and the activists of the communist movement in Macedonia or the partisans are proclaimed to be their heirs and successors of their struggle and covenants.

In Croatia, historian Nada Kisić Kolanović published a monograph in 2003 that examines the relationship between the Ustasha movement and the IMRO and the Macedonian emigration, as well as the role of Ivan Mihaylov in Bulgarian -Croatian relations in the period 1941-1944. By studying Croatian diplomatic reports, she gains an idea of Iv. Mihaylov's relations with the Bulgarian state, as well as with Bulgarian nationalist organizations. From her research, it can be concluded that Iv. Mihaylov pursued his own independent policy and his efforts were aimed at the liberation of all parts of the region of Macedonia, which is why he sought allies with the great powers that days. In her research, there are no allegations that he was a follower of the ideology of National Socialism or Fascism, nor that he was a tool of the Axis powers. On the contrary, according to Kolanović, he was the subject of constant surveillance by the German security services, as well as by the Italian and Bulgarian diplomats in Zagreb.⁸

Separate studies by English-speaking authors have also been reviewed, which also explore the Bulgarian administration of Vardar Macedonia. It is called the “occupation” or “annexation” of Vardar Macedonia by Bulgaria, which was not allowed by official Berlin to formally annex it. The studies claim that despite this, the Bulgarian government declared that it annexed these territories and considered them an integral part of its state. They also write that Bulgaria pursues a

⁸ **Kisić-Kolanović**, N. Zagreb - Sofia . Prijateljstvo yes measure war times 1941-1945. Zagreb : Dom i svijet , 2003, p. 91-138.

nationalist policy in the occupied territories of Yugoslavia and Greece, and “Bulgarization” is a standard thing practiced by civil and religious institutions in the country.⁹

The dissertation studied and analyzes the researches of individual Polish, Czech and Greek historians, which only partially address the topic under study.¹⁰

Motivated by this less than satisfactory historiographical context, the present dissertation attempts to study the participation and position towards the Bulgarian administration of Vardar Macedonia of the various groups of IMARO and IMRO figures, including specifically Ivan Mihaylov. So far, this issue has not been extensively researched and I hope that the present study will be a significant step and a serious stimulus for subsequent studies of the role of many prominent figures of the Internal Organization in these war years, of their relations with the Bulgarian state and their positions towards its policy.

II. Structure and content of the dissertation

The text of the dissertation is structured into an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, appendices, sources and bibliography.

The **introduction** to the dissertation presents the reasons for choosing the topic, the main objectives and tasks set for the study. The sources included and consulted for writing the dissertation are listed. A thorough historiographical review of the topic is made, with particular

⁹ **Poulton , H.** The Balkans: Minorities and states in conflict. London: Minority Rights, 1993, p. 48; **Poulton , H.** Who are the Macedonians? Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995, p. 101-102 ; **Biondich , M.** The Balkans: Revolution, War, and Political Violence since 1878. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 , p. 134 .

¹⁰ **Kavka , I.** History of Macedonia. Skopje: Menorah, 2002, p. 250-263 (translation of the original edition Stawowy-Kawka, Irena. Historia Macedonii, Wrocław-Warszawa - Kraków: Ossolineum, 2000); **Rihlik , J., Kouba , M.** History of Macedonia . Skopje : Macedonian Speech, 2009, p. 241-254 (translation of the original edition Jan Rychlik , Miroslav Kouba . History Macedonia . People's noviny : Praha , 2003); **Άνν α Πα τζέλη** , Κα τοχή ή Απ ελευθέρως ; Sights της β ουλγ αρικης π ολιτικής in Γιουγκοσλ αβική Μα κεδονί α κα τά the It lasts a Δευτέρως Πα γκοσμίου Polemou (1941-1944). Αριστοτέλειο Πα νε πιστήμιο Θεσσ αλονίκης, 2019.

attention paid to some of the studies that are more significant and examine the matter in a different way.

The first chapter of the dissertation "Vardar Macedonia on the Eve of Bulgarian administration" is an introductory part, which presents Vardar Macedonia within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as well as the members of the IMRO until 1934. The positions of the organizations of Bulgarians from Macedonia living in the Kingdom of Bulgaria and overseas are analyzed, and their views on accession, i.e. the solution of the Macedonian question before and during the war. The defeat of Yugoslavia and the local Bulgarian Action Committees created that same month, which have the function of temporary authorities after the entry of German military units, are briefly outlined.

The second chapter, "The Veterans of the IMARO and the Bulgarian Administration of Vardar Macedonia," presents the establishment of Bulgarian administration in Vardar Macedonia and gives examples of IMARO activists who returned there. The expansion of the organizational structures of the Ilinden Organization in the lands annexed to Bulgaria is described. Their activities and participation in most celebrations on the occasion of national holidays and anniversaries of significant events is described. The situation of the organization of veterans of the Macedonian - Adriatic Volunteers and its structures in Vardar Macedonia is also presented. The majority of these volunteers were also active fighters in the liberation movement during the Ottoman rule in Macedonia and Thrace. Finally, an analysis of the relations between the Bulgarian authorities and the veterans of the IMARO and IMRO is made, presenting the process that resulted in the decision of the Bulgarian National Assembly to recognize the participants in the national liberation movement against the Ottomans, Serbs and Greeks as Bulgarian national revolutionaries. Based on a special law from the beginning of 1943 for the especially meritorious figures in the liberation struggles, thousands of Bulgarians from Vardar Macedonia sent applications for pensions, certifying their Bulgarian origin and attaching evidence of their participation in the struggles.

The accession of parts of Macedonia to the Kingdom of Bulgaria was perceived by the old revolutionaries as liberation. Political parties and ideological differences were forgotten and a new era began for them, in which they felt obliged to help the Bulgarian state, considering this a continuation of their struggle for freedom under the Bulgarian flag in Macedonia. But they also

quite justifiably expected that the new government would help them, including materially, since during the years under foreign rule they had lost their home, property, and income.

The **third chapter** presents the life and activities of the last leader of the historical IMRO, Ivan Mihaylov, on the eve and during the Second World War and the Bulgarian administration of Vardar Macedonia. His stay in Turkey until the end of the summer of 1938 and his subsequent move to Poland are described. His activities during his stay in Zagreb from 1941 to 1944 are presented and analyzed in more depth, using mainly reports of Bulgarian and Croatian diplomats close to Mihaylov in those years. Previously unexplored archival documents are used and Ivan Mihaylov's positions during the war are examined in a new way.

From all the documents submitted regarding Ivan Mihaylov and his activities, we can come to the conclusion that while he was a member of the Central Committee of the IMRO and its de facto leader (1924-1934), as well as during the subsequent period of exile after May 19, 1934, including during the Second World War, Mihaylov did not change his principles and views on the solution of the Macedonian question. After it turned out to be impossible to annex the entire Macedonia to Bulgaria, the only solution that could have kept the Bulgarian identity in Macedonia intact was that of an autonomous and independent Macedonia. It was originally conceived as a temporary and transitional stage towards unification with the Kingdom of Bulgaria.

Overall, we can conclude that there are no historical sources that prove that Ivan Mihaylov collaborated in any form with the Bulgarian military-administrative authorities in Vardar Macedonia.

The **fourth chapter**, "The activists of the IMRO and the Bulgarian government in Vardar Macedonia", examines the relations between the activists of the IMRO and the Bulgarian military and administrative authorities, and also draws on archival documents that show what the attitude towards the Bulgarian government was of the activists of the IMRO around Ivan Mihaylov - Kiril Drangov, Vladimir Kurtev, Yordan Chkatrov, Asen Avramov, etc., and of the activists of the IMRO-MMTRO - Dimitar Chkatrov, Dimitar Gyuzelev, the Svetievi brothers, etc.

From the presented historical and archival documentation, it can be concluded that the two mainly groups of national figures during the Bulgarian governing, claim to be representatives of a revolutionary Macedonia. The first group originates from the leadership of the IMRO (1928-1934), when Ivan Mihaylov emerged as the undisputed leader of the Organization.

The members of the last staff of the Central Committee of the Organization Ivan Mihaylov, Vladimir Kurtev and Georgi Nastev and the reserve members Mihaylov Monev, Kiril Drangov and Yordan Chkatrov accepted the Bulgarian administration of Vardar Macedonia as liberation and, apart from appeals and organizing meetings for political and administrative changes in the territory under Bulgarian control, did not undertake any other activity. Leading members of the group, subordinate to Ivan Mihaylov, and which was active on the ground in Vardar Macedonia and in Bulgaria in those years, were Vladimir Kurtev, Georgi Nastev, Dimitar Tsilev, Asen Avramov, Boris Bunev, Strahil Razvigorov, Asen and Atanas Albanski, etc.

The group is placed under the surveillance of the State Security Service of the Kingdom of Bulgaria, which monitors their meetings, travels and reports on everything they undertake or say, with the emphasis being placed on whether this group of IMRO – Ivan Mihaylov is working for autonomy for Macedonia under the auspices of Italy or Germany. The facts indicate that the group is conducting propaganda for autonomy for Macedonia, but this is not under the directives of Italy or Germany, but rather with the aim of obtaining an autonomous status for Vardar Macedonia within the framework of the Bulgarian state.

The second group are the members of the Macedonian Youth Secret Revolutionary Organization (MMTRO), who operated and lived in Vardar Macedonia during the interwar Serbian regime. The activists of MMTRO welcomed the Bulgarian state power with great enthusiasm and high expectations. The oppressive regime of Belgrade prohibited national freedoms and rights of the Bulgarians in Vardar Macedonia. That part of the intelligentsia and the local elite, which preserved its Bulgarian character unblemished, and which opposed the systematic terror exercised by the Serbian regime, hated its compatriots, who bowed their heads before the Serbian rulers. During the period under review, leading figures of the young Bulgarian revolutionaries from MMTRO and the local Bulgarian intelligentsia of Vardar Macedonia were Dimitar Chkatrov and Dimitar Gyuzelev, who lived and worked in Skopje. Their activities consist of meetings with various leaders in the regional institutions of Skopje and Bitola, as well as with mayors of individual cities and villages. They advocate for more local people to be placed in leading administrative positions in Vardar Macedonia. Since the very accession of the region to Bulgaria, their proposal has been to hold elections in the country, which would give the Bulgarians from Vardar Macedonia the opportunity to elect their representatives to the Bulgarian parliament. At the same time, they are also among the first to welcome Bulgarian government representatives during

their visits to Vardar Macedonia. The Bulgarian government often listens to their requests and often people nominated by them are placed in management positions. However, for a number of reasons, a large part of the administration in the Bitola and Skopje regions are former officials or functionaries from the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which they (MMTRO members) cannot reconcile with, considering it a betrayal of their self-sacrifice. Another problem they point to is the administration from the old borders of the Kingdom Bulgaria, which they describe as unprepared for the historical mission it must accomplish.

Documents were obtained and analyzed, testifying to the attitude of the Communist Party of Macedonia (CPM) towards the activists of the IMRO, which turned out to be hostile and it denied the existence of a Bulgarian nationality on the territory of the region of Macedonia both during the war and in general in historical terms. In parallel with this, the CPM declared the partisans to be the new "Ilinden uprising heroes", bearers of the ideals of the Macedonian revolutionaries Gotse Delchev, Dame Gruev, Nikola Karev and others. The communists declared their ambition to be the heirs of the "Krushevo Republic". From this we understand that the leaders of the communists in Vardar Macedonia are either not aware of the history of the recent past, or are deliberately abusing the name of Ilinden uprising revolutionaries and the "Krushevo Republic" created thanks to the IMARO, in order to attract the population to the partisan ranks.

Conclusion

The conclusion summarizes the newly discovered historical facts, events and processes analyzed in the dissertation. Based on all the facts and information presented, it is concluded that during the research period the relations between the activists of the Internal Organization and the Bulgarian military-administrative authorities developed in a positive direction and played an important role in the very governance of Vardar Macedonia. The activists of the Internal Organization of the Ilinden Uprising, who were contemporaries of the Bulgarian government in Vardar Macedonia, were among the most enthusiastic about its accession to Bulgaria. They were the main propagandists in Vardar Macedonia of the idea of United Bulgaria and worked actively by appealing at their meetings in villages and towns to the Bulgarian population to be loyal and to fight for the Bulgarian national interests, because the national ideal had already been almost achieved.

It can be categorically said that historical sources to this date do not point evidence of Ivan Mihaylov and the leaders of the IMRO being attached to national socialist and fascist ideas. Without reservation, it can be stated that despite the existing dissatisfaction with some policies of the Bulgarian government, the members of the IMARO and the IMRO viewed the accession of Vardar Macedonia to the Bulgarian state as liberation from Serbian slavery.

III. Contributions of the dissertation work

As a scientific contribution, can be highlighted the analysis of documents testifying to the views of the remaining living veterans of the IMARO, called at that time "Ilindenci". The unconditional support of the veterans to the Bulgarian government and the idea of a United Bulgaria is presented, in the implementation of which they take an active part, including as propagandists of the Bulgarian state policy. It is illustrated with a number of examples - the return of some of the old veterans to their birthplaces in Vardar Macedonia, their mass participation and organizing of celebrations on the occasion of national holidays in the Kingdom, etc. The most significant is the contribution of the Ilinden Organization and the Union of Macedonian - Adriatic Volunteer Organization in Bulgaria to the initiative for the adoption of the Law on the Meritorious Figures in the Liberation Struggles (February 1943). This law received the support of the representatives of the people in the National Assembly, who even reproached the Bulgarian government for its delay.

Ivan Mihaylov's positions during the war have been studied in a new way. Since the autumn of 1943, Ivan Mihaylov had foreseen that in a re-enslaved Macedonia the struggle for Bulgarian national rights would be very difficult. In September 1943, Mihaylov shared his opinion on the issue of the Jews in Croatia and Bulgaria and the measures against them. He emphasized that the Bulgarian people did not understand these measures, nor did hatred of Jews exist among the Bulgarians. According to Iv. Mihaylov, everywhere in Bulgaria the Jews were on good terms with the rest of the people. Iv. Mihaylov consciously did not interfere in politics because he believed that the fate of Macedonia would be decided only after the end of the war. While still in Zagreb, Mihaylov declared his respect for the power and future of the USA and emphasized that in this war the USA would not be defeated, but on the contrary would rise stronger and with greater influence. Mihaylov's attitude towards Italy was negative.

The IMRO group around Iv. Mihaylov did not take part in the governance of Vardar Macedonia. Also, neither he nor his associates loyal to him during this period had anything to do with the organization of the counter-insurgency units in Vardar Macedonia under Bulgarian rule.

The study confirms that the network of the youth organization MMTRO was preserved and functioned during the war. In fact, the “ Chkatrov -Gyuzelev group”, as it is called in most studies in Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia, should be called IMRO-MMTRO. During the Bulgarian administration, they acted in support of Bulgarian unification.

The study also analyzes the relations between IMRO-MMTRO and IMRO figures closer to Ivan Mihaylov, concluding that the disputes between them are on a personal basis, mostly about which of them has earned the right to rule in Macedonia.

IV. Publications on the topic of the dissertation

1. Joshevski , Al. Refugee organizations of the Macedonian Bulgarians and their views on resolving the Macedonian question. - "Library" magazine, 2023, No. 1, 71-81.

2. Joshevski , Al. The printed publications of the Ilinden organization in the historiography of the Republic of North Macedonia. - "Tereni" magazine, No. 9: Student and doctoral readings , April/November 2022/2023, 131-142.

3. Joshevski , Al. The Ilinden Organization and Its Activities. Celebrations and manifestations During the Second World War. - "Library" Magazine, 2024, No. 4, 81-89.