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THE HOLY TRINITY: THE BOYCOTT POLICY OF THE MACEDONIAN REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION

Abstract. – The Macedonian Revolutionary Organization¹ was a latecomer in their secessionist attempts *vis à vis* the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, in its effort to gain autonomy (which will lead to an independent Macedonian state) from the Ottoman Empire, it met resistance from the Ottoman state and the neighboring countries their authorities and institutions operating in Late Ottoman Macedonia. In the struggle for obtaining autonomy, MRO leaders tried to establish an underground republic, with their own institutions (militia, revolutionary courts), and introduce their own policy (economic, educational, etc.) to engulf the socio-economic life of the Macedonian population. In doing so, they tried to undermine the Ottoman Empire's official institutions and attract as many people as possible for their Cause. Convenient in this regard was their boycott policy towards their rival institution groups and individuals in Ottoman Macedonia. In the pages below, the attempt is to give a short description of this MRO policy, touching upon their activities against the Exarchate, in particular, the boycott of the official school curriculum; the economic boycott towards the individuals and groups who were mistreating the local population; and their boycott of the official Ottoman courts.

The first of all three issues being the most complex requires some introductory remarks. At first sight, it might seem a bit contradictory that the MRO members, most of them graduates of the Exarchate schools in Ottoman

¹ The Organization changed its name several times. For the sake of consistency, we will use the general name in this article.

Macedonia opposed the institution they obtained their education from. The most straightforward answer is that MRO had a different goal and plans for Ottoman Macedonia than the Exarchate.² While the latter was an institution controlled by the Bulgarian Principality, a carrier of the ideas and politics of the Bulgarian state who (like Greece and Serbia) was counting on the future dissolution of the Empire and gaining (much) of the Macedonian territory, MRO dreamed of an autonomous Macedonia, with the possibility of future Balkan federation in which Macedonia will be an equal part. Therefore, most of the MRO members opposed the policy of the Exarchate, who, according to the millet system, was also responsible for the education of its flock. Since many of the Macedonian Slav-speaking Christians abandoned the Patriarchate after 1870 to join a Slavic church that was conducting the mass and the education in a more understandable language (than the Greek used in the Patriarchate Church-educational communes), MRO members decided to start acting among the Macedonian Exarchate population at the beginning and then open the doors for membership to all unsatisfied elements in Macedonia regardless of their religious, national or political belonging/believes.³ However, since the very foundations, MRO had tense relations with the Exarchate and its representatives in Ottoman Macedonia.

Moreover, being critical to the policy of the Exarchate was one of the conditions to join the ranks of MRO. The Organization even made one of its leading members, Petar Pop Arsov, write a brochure against the Bulgarian Exarchate. In his booklet, Pop Arsov criticizes the educational policy of the Exarchate in Macedonia and the Bulgarian Boys Gymnasium “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Salonica⁴ in particular. He criticizes its autocratic policies, especially its acts towards the Macedonian teachers with more liberal views. For example, the director of the Gymnasium, Lazarov, favored the teachers from Bulgaria, thus creating a situation of division between the teachers in two camps, “Northerners” and “Macedonians,” the former being the privileged ones. In this regard, he stresses that:

² More about the policy of MRO towards the Exarchate see in Николов 2017, 16-54.

³ As stressed in the 1896 constitution in article 4, dealing with the membership: “*A Member of S.M.A.R.O (from the Thessalonica Congress of 1896 the new name of the organization is Secret Macedonian Adrianople Revolutionary Organization) can be any Macedonian or citizen of the Adrianople region who has not compromised himself with anything dishonest and characterless before society and who promises to work for the benefit of the revolutionary liberation cause.*” Димески 2008, 27-29.

⁴ More about the activities and goal of this as well as other Gymnasiums see in Минов 2017, 314.

*“The situation of the Macedonian – teacher in the Salonica Gymnasium is difficult! When our teachers are entering the Gymnasium building, they feel like they are in some Turkish office, where they should think well of their words, should count them, or are declared as separatists.”*⁵

Pop Arsov not only thinks that the educational policy of the Exarchate does not meet the needs of the Macedonian youth, but moreover, it is:

“just a North Bulgarian Jesuitic order... with a goal containing a tendency – to be created Bulgarians in Macedonia” and goes even further to claim that:

*“They give us money to kill us... Damn it that money if they kill our communes, moreover, they don't trust us and impose to them all kinds of presidents, priests, directors, teachers, etc., to control the (?!) finances – the only motivation of the Bulgarian propaganda!... Yes, the Bulgarian propaganda.”*⁶

Therefore, he is nostalgic about the days when the local population was responsible for the community affairs:

“All honest Macedonians, Help! Come and help us save the communes who are dying in Macedonia. This is their tool to make us a dead corpse, so our brothers can play with us as they please.” And continues: *“In the commune, even under the Greek priests, our people were free to think of management of schools, church, and monasteries, as well as other communal issues. Here they practiced societal cooperation, humanism, not thinking only of its personal benefits. Here, in our only parliament, our people's old Slavic democratic spirit was preserved (...). The Exarchate tries to destroy the same commune, the only people's institution, that kept our national physiognomy. To suppress it and suffocate the people's spirit.”*⁷ If we are to compare with the thoughts of another founder of MRO on the same issue, the words of Dame Gruev are indicative. In a letter to his friend Nikola Deykov (end of March 1894), he stresses that the schools in Macedonia under the current Exarchate management are *“utterly harmful to the country because they can deprive the country of our young forces and kill the people's spirit.”* Once MRO realized the consequences of such educational policy of the Exarchate decided to act independently. And according to Gruev, the Organization pointed its attention towards the schools because they are the basis of everything, and this topic could be made available to anyone.⁸ Similarly, Pop Arsov says that: *“our work should be in the*

⁵ Вардарски 2006, 78.

⁶ Ibid, 94-95.

⁷ Вардарски 2006, 86-95; Билярски & Бурилкова 2007, 93.

⁸ Ѓорѓиев 2010.

direction that the communes should support the schools independently and the priority should be given to the local intelligentsia. From them, the school directors, and priests, etc., should be elected. Because simply put, the schools as they operate now are not acting for the country's benefit in which they exist."⁹

Nevertheless, those days were by far gone, and the Exarchate was the institution responsible for the church educational activities of their flock in Ottoman Macedonia, and as such recognized by the Ottoman authorities. And MRO also had to acknowledge the reality on the ground. However, not being happy with the situation mentioned above, they tried to change it to their advantage by infiltrating their members in the Exarchate schools, thus gaining control over them. Even though they had a short period for agitation, MRO founders decided to participate in the church-educational communal council of the *kaza* of Salonica with their list of candidates. Surprisingly for their pro Exarchate opponents, the MRO list lead by doctor Hristo Tatarchev won the elections with 90% of the votes.¹⁰

The core of the fight against the Bulgarian Exarchate was in Salonica, accordingly, the Organization had its first success in the center of Ottoman Macedonia. Nevertheless, the ideas and the goals of MRO spread quickly in the other bigger cities in Macedonia.¹¹

As a result of the MRO's operation and the complaining of the Exarchate, the Ministry of Foreign affairs of Bulgaria sent a letter to the Bulgarian agents in Macedonia with instructions on how they should act towards MRO. The ministry recommends that: "*The education should be kept away from the hands of the Organization as far as possible.*" Because "*the activity of the clergy*

⁹ Вардарски, 51; *Вътрешната македоно-одринска*, 80. They did not only criticize the policy of the Exarchate in Macedonia, but also pointed the finger to the Ottoman Empire who was responsible, tolerating and even encouraging the educational activities of the churches in Ottoman Macedonia. For example, in the article "The schools, churches and communes, in Macedonia" in the pro-MRO newspaper *Дебъръ*, we find this statement regarding this issue: "*At last, the Turkish government, in order to encourage antagonism among the Macedonians in Macedonia, allowed the various national and religious propagandas to open schools, churches, and communes, which instead of benefit are bringing damage, especially to the intelligentsia. In doing so, an intellectual proletariat is created, and it is forced to migrate and seek its survival in state service in the liberated brotherly countries instead of staying in its fatherland, among the people.*" В. Училищата, църквите и общините во Македонија. *Дебъръ*, брой 15, София, 10 Септември, 1905 год., стр. 1.

¹⁰ The pro-Exarchate elements will not accept these results, and they will do anything to cancel them. Still, though with an unreasonable delay, in the end, the victory of MRO will be confirmed. See Николов 2017, 20-23.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 29.

are well known, and that gives us the right to support it fully. On the contrary, the Organization is in suspicious hands, and the results of their activity are only causing damage."¹²

Nevertheless, MRO continued to circumvent and, to a significant extent, boycott the curriculum of the Exarchate. The teachers-members of the Organization were teaching the Macedonian youth only that which they thought was necessary for the students and could benefit the Cause. Such behavior of the MRO teacher would not be left without a reaction from the Exarchate. In the circular letters sent to the school management, the teachers-members of MRO were accused of promoting atheism among the students, did not go to church, and, even worse, were not taking the kids to the church. Also, they were accused that Bulgarian history was neglected and it was replaced with world history. What was worrying the high echelon of the Exarchate was the fact that the students were not fluent in Bulgarian, even after graduating from high school, and they did not use it outside the school. The Exarchate school directors and inspectors should watch the MRO teachers who were often threatened and sometimes removed from service.¹³

The response of MRO was decisive too. During the summer holidays in 1898, Gjorche Petrov, as representative of MRO, met with the Exarch Josif I demanding that the list with 70 teachers (all members of the Organization) be appointed in the Exarchate schools. The Exarch was not willing to fulfill those demands. Still, Petrov threatened him that MRO would frighten teachers who oppose the Organization, organize student strikes, and even suggest the students leave the schools if he did not comply.¹⁴ In the end, the Exarch had to back off and agree on the terms indicated by MRO though unwillingly, and mainly as a result made by the threat of the Organization.

The condition of the gymnasium in Bitola where the MRO teachers had significant influence among the students was noted by the director A. Chengelov who informed the Exarch about it. In his report (July 1899), he stresses his dissatisfaction with the teacher's work.¹⁵ Chengelov summarized that there were two groups of teachers in the gymnasium. The first was the dominant one and its members were: G. Angelov, V. Paskov, D. Gruev, T. Lu-

¹² Државен Архив на Република Северна Македонија, ф. КБТА, мф. 4316, ф. 335, а.е. 37, сн. 1-4. See also Ѓорѓиев 2013, 135-137.

¹³ Николов 2017, 42-43. For instance, Dame Gruev was removed from his post in the school year of 1897/1898 under the accusation of atheism. Спомени. И. X. Николов..., 1995, 20. Николов 2017, 43.

¹⁴ Николов 2017, 44-45.

¹⁵ Ѓорѓиев 2010, 229.

kanov (M. Gerdjikov) and P. Martulkov. They were with many “liberal standpoints” in all regards.¹⁶ According to Chengelov, these teachers were spreading: “*anarchy, atheism, were not respecting the rights and opinions of those who were not sharing their opinions.*” And the students were quickly becoming their followers.¹⁷

He was also complaining about the students' conduct and grades, which were artificially made satisfactory but did not correspond with reality. In this regard, he gives the example that the average rate for the students conduct for the whole school is 4.9 (out of 5.00)¹⁸. He is also skeptical of the objectivity of grades given by the teachers mentioned above. So, he stresses that G. Angelov did not stop the student from copying their work, and the remaining there were going by the motto “*let us not kill the future of the students.*”¹⁹ In this regard, Chengelov is surprised how come D. Gruev and V. Paskov, and T. Lukanov managed to grade the students when they barely made a test for their knowledge, both for the oral and written exam.²⁰

The “sins” of the teachers, members of MRO did not stop here. The director also points out that the curriculum was intentionally neglected to give room for revolutionary agitation. Thus, the history teacher V. Paskov taught certain events in detail, and the other topics were not even touched upon. For instance, the whole semester in the seventh grade was dedicated to the History of the French Revolution.²¹

Except for the circumvent of the Exarchate curriculum in the schools, MRO teachers conducted their educational policy by forming the so-called school clubs. These school clubs were the reservoir from where the Organization was filling its ranks. For instance, many Macedonian revolutionaries like Hristo Uzunov, Lazar Pop Trajkov, Pando Kljashev, Gjorgji Sugarev, and others were part of these clubs.²² To protect themselves from the Ottoman and Exarchate authorities, the student clubs worked in a conspiracy. Some of them even published their newspapers which were delivered in the schools.²³ Also, student excursions were organized where the students, liberated from

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Даме Груев – Спомени, 1999, 163-164.

¹⁸ Ѓорѓиев, 2010, 229.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 231.

²² Пандевски 1962, 225.

²³ Ibid.

the pressure of the Exarchate authorities, could freely talk on subjects that were not part of the official school curriculum.²⁴

Moreover, the student clubs defended their student rights. Thus, they organized strikes when they felt that there was injustice done to them by the school management, like removing a student from the school or protesting against some teacher they did not like and asked for its removal.²⁵ All of the mentioned above was in accordance with the policy of MRO who wanted to transform the Macedonian youth from a passive, obedient listener to an active agent who can contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Organization with a proactive role in the liberation of the fatherland.

A witness of such policy of MRO was one of the Russian military representatives²⁶ in Ottoman Macedonia, Agura. In his report of August 19 he talks about the efforts of the church educational commune in Kukush (Kilkis) to start with the construction of a new church in the town. However, when the people gathered, one student from the sixth grade, under the instruction from the Organization, addressed the crowd that *“they do not need churches, but schools; they do not need a religion, but freedom; and that the money collected for the construction of the church, should be used for the liberation cause.”*²⁷ After the speech, one of the school teachers applauded the student, which was the reason for her removal from the school.

Years of MRO's work and their agitation among the population in Ottoman Macedonia enabled the Organization to start building its own juridical system. It usually went hand in hand with the Organizational policy to boycott the official Ottoman courts. We can trace the inception of this policy back to the very beginning of 1901. According to Ivan Atanasov Grcheto, Gotse Delchev, during his visit to the village Monospitovo, propagated among the local leaders of MRO that they should agitate among the local population not to go to the Turkish courts which are just robbing them, but to establish village courts where the peasants can settle their disputes.²⁸

At the end of the same year, Delchev revised the *chetas* in southwest Macedonia. In the village of Konomladi, together with the *voyvodas* Pando Kljashev, Marko Lerinski, Vasil Chakalarov, Moskov, Stefo Kuzov, and Georgi Peshkov conducted trials, and later on, the verdicts were conducted by the

²⁴ Спомени. С. Арсов..., 1997, 159.

²⁵ Пандевски 1962, 25.

²⁶ On the basis on the Mürzsteg Agreement.

²⁷ Дракул 1998, 127.

²⁸ Движението отсамъ Вардара..., 139-140; Пандевска 2002, 170.

MRO *chetas*. Delchev carefully examined the different cases (robbery, debauchery, etc.), and there were also witnesses during the trial. In the end, everybody accepted the decisions made by Delchev, who, together with the other *vojvodas* of MRO, forbade the peasants to go to the Ottoman courts.²⁹

In this period, the network of MRO was widespread throughout Macedonia, so the idea of establishing local courts of the Organization materialized fast in almost all the districts and local comities of MRO. Nikola Petrov Rusinski did not lose time to put this idea into fruition as well. During his visit to the village Zhvan near Demirhisar, he propagated that the peasants should not seek any help or advice from the Turkish courts.³⁰ He also stopped all the active court cases in the Ottoman courts or the church-communal ones³¹, such as various requests, divorce suits, etc., and at the same time established village courts for minor delicts.³² He also mentioned that the Organization “*has no police stations, dungeons or temporary prisons to correct their delicts, and the traitors are to be punished by death.*”³³

The details of the work of MRO courts are not the subject of analyses in this article.³⁴ However, several observations will be given to show the effects of the MRO juridical system and its boycott policy on the Ottoman and, to a lesser extent, church-communal courts. So, for instance, G. Iv. Belev, in 1904 says that the courts in Bitola (Monastir) were abandoned because the people loyal to MRO, instead of going to the lawyers³⁵ or the Ottoman courts, preferred to address the courts of the Organization, who solved all of their disputes.³⁶

Тома Николов even more confidently claims that after the establishment of the MRO juridical system in the Bitola region, “*the Turkish courts became deserted, and the kadis in the absence of work were occupied with their beards and rosaries because for them there was no more the possibility of the*

²⁹ Спомени на П. Кљашев..., 198.

³⁰ Никола Петров Русински, Спомени, 138.

³¹ Sometimes MRO judges gave a verdict on a divorce case, and afterward, that decision was transferred to the church authorities, who had to confirm the decision made in the MRO courts. See, for example Sonnichsen 1909, 173-174; Николов 2017, 115.

³² Петровъ 1930, 11.

³³ Русински, Спомени..., 138.

³⁴ For a detailed analysis of the MRO's courts, see Николов 2017, 76-96.

³⁵ Some members advocated that lawyers should be boycotted, as was the case with the official Ottoman courts. For example, see the stances of Hristo Uzunov on this matter. Христо Узунув, Забелешки 173; Николов 2017, 104.

³⁶ Бълевъ 1931, 15.

golden income through the *rushvet* (bribery). The state treasury was also deprived of regular income for various transactions. The Christian population went to the Ottoman authorities only for obtaining a passport or for some sales transaction. That was a surprise for the Turkish authorities". Similarly, Anastas Lozanchev says that after the MRO decided for its members to boycott the Ottoman courts, they remained without clients. He also adds that many trials that were ongoing for thirty-forty years and a fortune was spent to solve them were resolved by the courts of the Organization in a matter of one or two hours. That was a relief for both sides.³⁷

In the Shtip region, Mishe Razvigorov forbade the peasants to go to the official courts, and he even threatened the local population if they did not obey this order. As a result, the people stopped seeking justice from the Ottoman authorities.³⁸

Similar observations to the abovementioned claims of MRO members about their juridical system are given by some foreigners who had their service in Ottoman Macedonia. Thus, the Bulgarian trade agent A. Shopov from in his report from November 30, 1902, says that he found out from the conversation with the villagers from the *kaza* of Salonica that the MRO *chetas*, except the usual duties, have juridical responsibilities as well. Moreover, the villagers who had disputes would rather seek justice from the Organizational *chetas*, then the Ottoman courts.³⁹ He gave several cases for a robbery that the Ottoman authorities could not resolve and the *chetas* of MRO for a short period managed to catch the thieves and bring back the stolen goods to the owners.⁴⁰

³⁷ Лозанчевъ 1940, 2.

³⁸ Мирчевъ & Развигоровъ 1932, 5. Apart from the observation of the foreign representatives in Ottoman Macedonia who testify that such statements of MRO members are not much exaggerated, there are few clues from documents from the Ottoman institutions, which may point out the possibility that the MRO boycott policy affected the Ottoman courts in Macedonia (together with the overall bad economic situation in the Empire). Such were the troubles in the courts of the first instance (*bidayet mahkemesi*) in Avret-hisar because the scribes did not receive their salary. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (further BOA), TFR.I. SL, 170, 16941.; Similarly, the janitor of the court in Manastir Hacı Abdullah bin Mehmed in 1902 had not received a salary for four months. BOA, TFR.I. MN, 129, 12838; Or the problems with the payment of the employees in the courts of Florina and Ohrid. BOA, TFR.I.MN., 150, 14990. And the annulment of Criminal departments at the courts of first instances in some districts (*kazas*) in the vilayets of Selanik and Manastir. BOA. LAZN, 66, 01.

³⁹ Ѓорѓиев 2003, 422.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The Austro-Hungarian vice-consul in Bitola goes even further in his depiction of MRO's activities. In his report of December 13, 1904, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Agenor Goluchowski says that as a result of the activities of the Organization in the districts of Prilep and Veles (Köprülü), one can say that in these districts, *“there is a parallel government. And the Committee governs this area to such an extent that the local people do not address its issues to the Turkish courts for months. Against the verdicts of the village comities, appellation can proceed to the tribunal in Prilep, which is the last instance. This system must have been advantageous due to the short procedure and the implicit executions.”*⁴¹

We can give several more examples that indicate that the MRO took the establishment and the development of the juridical system quite seriously. For instance, in the resolution of the Ser revolutionary congress in 1906, we find that the juridical body informed the Congress that for the current year, 190 disputes were resolved, and only 25 were left for trial.⁴² And such results were possible because MRO introduced the policy of boycotting the Ottoman courts and due to its “juridical” cadre and their enthusiasm to bring justice where ever needed and to be the supreme authority on the ground. In this regard, Uzunov recommends for the juridical body to be chosen honest people, from the *esnaf*, who have gained the trust of the majority of the people and who are familiar with the social life of the people, with the local traditions, and with the state and the church law.⁴³ According to him, being a member of such a body is a serious thing, and the one who is chosen to be part of it should not give up his membership unless he has credible reasons. He should also inform the district management of MRO, which approves or disapprove of his decision.⁴⁴

An interesting observation of the dedication of the MRO members (in this case Petar Chaulev-Petrush) to the juridical system of the Organization is given by the American journalist, Albert Sonnichsen, who in 1906 spend some time with the members and *chetas* of MRO, which allowed him to get familiar with the work of the Organization closely.

⁴¹ Извештаи од 1903-1904 година, 258. Similarly, the role of the courts in the MRO policy is described by Dame Gruev to the representative of Edinburgh's “The Blackwoods Magazine” where he calls the administrative mechanism of the Organization an “Underground Republic.” Ѓорѓиев 2010, 450.

⁴² ВЪТРЕШНАТА, т. 1, част 2, 650.

⁴³ Узунов, Забелешки 172; ВЪТРЕШНАТА... т. 1, част 1, 407.

⁴⁴ Узунов, Забелешки 172-173; ВЪТРЕШНАТА... т. 1, част 1, 407.

(...) At breakfast this morning, I observed a bundle of old and greasy papers choking Petrush's dispatch bag. Among them was a well-worn copy of the constitution and by-laws. "Why do you carry around the rayon's archives?" I asked. "They aren't archives." His voice sounded resentful. "They're cases. I carry them with me because I have to study them." "Cases?" I exclaimed. "What cases?". My ignorance seemed to hurt him. He explained, laboriously and patiently: "Articles 10 to 15, of Section IV of the constitution say: 'The voyvoda shall settle disputes, etc. You know we're boycotting the Turkish courts.'" "Do you have them presented in writing?" I asked in astonishment "Why not? I can't judge them hot off the fire. Here, as an instance, is a land case. The priest presents one side, the schoolmaster the other. Twenty-five years ago, this man, Ivancho, leased a field to Stoyan. Ten years ago, Ivancho wanted his land back, but Stoyan refused to give it back unless he was paid for a barn he built on it and an orchard he planted. They went to court, and the litigation continued till the boycott was declared. Lately, they put it up before me." "Someday" I said, "a legal court will reopen these cases." He agreed, but if ever I read a man's s thoughts right, I did then. Petrush saw the cases reopened, years hence, but he also saw himself, then a passed student of law, re-trying them.⁴⁵

Such an approach of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization increased the peasants' trust in the MRO courts and the Organization in general.

On the way to becoming a parallel state in Ottoman Macedonia, MRO introduced some economic policies too.⁴⁶ In general, MRO tried to detect and eliminate the reasons for the poor material condition of Ottoman Macedonia's (mainly rural) community and introduce its policies and solutions to improve the population's living conditions.

One of the most consistent policies in MRO's economic endeavors was the so-called boycott policy. In May 1901, the member of MRO Nikola Petrov Rusinski explained to his colleague Gj. Sugarev how he understands this policy:

"(...) the land will be taken away from the hands of the beys, as remains of the old feudal system, and will be given for free to the ones who are working on it. (...) In many places, we see how the beys are begging the peasants – part-time workers and farmers (ratay), to continue to work on their lands, or they suggest buying the land from them (...) Even in the cases where the population

⁴⁵ Sonnichsen, 170-171.

⁴⁶ For a thorough analysis of the MRO economic policy, see Николов 2017, 120-177; Kostopulos 2016, 134-166.

*shows readiness to buy the land, I am against it – no one should buy it, or work on beys land, or if it does, he should not give anything to the owner, the bey. This measure is called a boycott. With it, the revolutionary will not work with weapons; instead, he will use the convincing word aimed at the exploited and badly mistreated part-time worker and farmer.*⁴⁷

We will give several examples to understand this policy of the Organization better. The boycott was not aimed only at the estate owners. In the western part of Ottoman Macedonia, some Turks went to the villages during the wintertime and left tobacco packages in the houses. This was not only done without the host's permission, neither did they negotiate about the price. After a while, when the peasants appear in the city, they ask for money for the tobacco as they please. Under threat and left without a choice, peasants would pay the required price.⁴⁸ With the help of the local *cheta* of the Organization led by Slaveyko Arsov, this injustice will slowly cease to exist. The *cheta* forbade the villagers to accept this smuggled (*kaçarma*) tobacco, and the women were throwing it away. The distributors knowing who was standing behind such behavior started to refrain from the acts of enforcement. The population began to smoke tobacco from a company that offered a smaller price. At the same time, they put out some rumors that there is a poison in the smuggled tobacco, so soon after in the cities as well, the use of this kind of tobacco decreased significantly.⁴⁹

It is interesting to note that MRO also used the boycott policy to manage some other social issues. Such was the case with the murder of one citizen of Ohrid, Naum Teofilov – Fortomarov. He was killed after closing his store by a man called Dalip. Even though the police were close to the place of the incident, they did not arrest the murderer, and he ran away in the Turkish neighborhood in the city. Due to these circumstances, the Ohrid committee of MRO decided to attain safer living conditions in the town. They decided to close the city marketplace (*çarşı*) at least for five-six days. Following this, they ordered that no one of the producers and providers come and bring products to the city. Also, a telegram should be sent directly to the sultan signed by all the leaders of the *mahals* to inform him about the dangerous and insecure position of the population in this region. The citizens complied with the orders of the Organization. They closed their stores (*dükkan*), and after the funeral went to the municipality (*belediye*) shouting: "Catch the murderer,

⁴⁷ Никола Петров Русински, *Спомени* 155.

⁴⁸ С. Арсов, *Спомени* 75.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 75-76.

it is not possible to work in such conditions, give us bread and security or throw us in the lake.”⁵⁰ On the third day, the assistant (muâvin) - Paskal Efendi of the governor came from Bitola (Manstir) to convince the *esnaf* to open the *çarşı*. Instructed by MRO, the *esnaf* and the citizens did not just listen to the authority but asked for guarantees about their lives and the imprisonment of the murderer. In the meantime, the situation with the lack of products in the city was becoming critical. This made the authorities to be more severe in the negotiations. Finally, after a few days of negotiations with the allowance of MRO people in Ohrid, the *çarşı* was opened. The citizens of Ohrid got assurance the murderer would be caught and put to trial. So it happened, and this one-week economic boycott resulted in the capture of the murderer, who was sent into the prison in Bitola.⁵¹

Similar activities, especially after the Ilinden Uprising in 1903, were undertaken against various enemies of MRO, especially against the representatives of the Greek propaganda in Ottoman Macedonia. To lower their influence and the support they gave to the Greek institutions, including the armed units in Macedonia, MRO gave various orders to the local population not to buy products from the Greek shops, not to work on the fields of the Greek *çorbaçis*, etc.⁵²

Some of the Ser region villages, a stronghold of one of the most prominent members of MRO – Yane Sandanski, developed a policy of a so-called “polite boycott.” The essence was the “willingness” to give, but nothing was to be provided in reality. So, for example, when the bey representative came to the village to take what was supposed to be his share, the inhabitants were hiding, and only the village leaders would show up. In such cases, they used a variety of excuses like: “*The peasants are ready to bring the beys his share in any time*”; “*It is such a pity that you came in a time when no one was home*”; “*Maybe if you are willing to come another day*” etc.⁵³

The Organization was not so optimistic about the foreign capital in the Ottoman Empire too. Thus, during the general Rilla Congress was deci-

⁵⁰ Кецкаровъ 1931, 1-2.

⁵¹ Ibid, 2-3.

⁵² For example, see the case with the boycott of working in the vineyard during the time of the grape harvest near Melnik, also spotted by the British vice-consul in Seres, and explained in detail in Николов 2017, 169-171. Or for the boycott policy of the Organization in the Lerin (Florina) district, and how it should be implemented see a detailed description in a circular letter of a member of MRO, Tano voyvoda in: ISAM (İslam Araştırma Merkezi), *Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa Evrak Kataloğu*, 15/974, doc. 7.

⁵³ Мақдермот 1987, 190.

ded that following the local conditions, the boycott of the foreign factories, companies, and their goods is also acceptable.⁵⁴ It appears the Ser group under the leadership of Sandanski was particularly interested in materializing these ideas. In their local Congress in Kadikoy (near Nevrokop) 1907, the delegates concluded that the capital dictates the politics of the European Powers,⁵⁵ which does not suit the benefit of the local population. Thus, the Organization should boycott the foreign capital and obstruct its existence in Ottoman Macedonia.⁵⁶

The benefits of the boycott policy of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization as described above were manifold. Firstly, it brought the Macedonian population closer to the Organization. With its policies, the Organization gained the trust of a significant portion of the local people, who perceived the *chetas* of MRO as protectors of all the elements and institutions who acted against their wellbeing. Second, the Organization established itself as an entity and factor to be recognized in solving the Macedonian question. As such, it worked closely with the Macedonian population, who were to be the future citizens of the autonomous/independent Macedonian state. In doing so, it had to undermine the influence of the official institutions and then offer the local population their own system of governance. The significant acceptance and support of the Macedonian population of the of MRO's goals and ideas, and their active participation in the Organization's activities indicates the success of the MRO's policies described above.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Дракул, 1998, 256; *Вътрешната...*, т. 1, част 1, 582.

⁵⁵ Макдермот 1987, 241.

⁵⁶ *Вътрешната...*, т. 1, част 2, 740-741.

⁵⁷ As was explained above, MRO opened its doors for all the unsatisfied elements in Ottoman Macedonia. This cosmopolitan idea was not easy to achieve in late Ottoman Macedonia. Thus, the Organization mainly attracted the rural Slavic population, mostly the members of the Exarchate. Still, it attracted some of the Patriarchists and Vlachs who were not in the service of the Greek propaganda. Also, the *chetas* of the Organization were supported by some Muslims (Turks, Albanians, and Roma population) and a minor part of the Jewish community. More about the policy of MRO towards the different ethnoreligious groups in Ottoman Macedonia see in Borche Nikolov, *MRO (Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) – A new Perspective on the Millets in Ottoman Macedonia*, [in:] *Osmanlı İdaresinde Balkanlar II*, ed. A. Aköz, et al., p. 71-100.

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