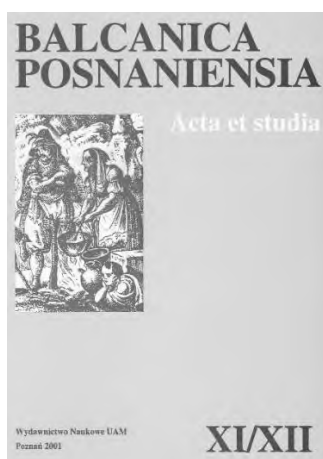




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Nauki II

## MACEDONIANS IN THE GREEK-ITALIAN WAR (1940-1941)

LILJANA PANOVSKA

ABSTRACT. Panovska Liljana, *Macedonians in the Greek-Italian War [1940-1941]* (Macedończycy i wojna grecko-włoska [1940-1941]). Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia, XI/XII, Poznań 2001. Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 215-220. ISBN 83-232-1078-0, ISSN 0239-4278. Text in English.

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When in 1940 the Greek-Italian War began one part of the Macedonian people had lived for almost 27 years within the Greek state. During this period on its national ethnic area, Macedonian people were exposed to a violent policy by the Greek authorities for its assimilation, denationalization, as well as to a policy of total extermination and exile. The realistic possibilities for active implementation of Buch policy by the Greek state over Macedonian people undoubtedly were given in the year 1913, with the Bucharest Peace Treaty, which followed after the ending of the II Balkan War. With this Treaty, Greece had expanded its state borders over traditionally Macedonian territory. The gained territory with total space of 34 356 square kilometers inhabited by a population of 370 372 Macedonians, at that moment could not have but impose the Macedonian nationality issue to the Greek State.<sup>1</sup> The Greek state tried to resolve this issue in various ways, without taking any notice of the right of Macedonian people to its own national space, and its own independent historical development. All this was done for a single goal – to create an integral and indivisible part of the Greek State. After 1913, and especially after World War I (1914-1918), the Greek authorities had apart from the national op-

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<sup>1</sup> The given number, that contains also the Macedonian moslems is stated in C. Киселиновски, *Грчката колонизација во егејска Македонија 1913-1940*, ИНИ, Скопје, 1981, 37; Idem, *Статусот на македонскиот јазик во Македонија (1913-1987)*, Мисла, Скопје 1990, 20; Idem, *Егејскиот дел на Македонија (1913-1989)*, Култура, Скопје 1990, 18 sq. According to the statistical estimations made on the basis of the staistics by Vasil Khchov and other sources, T. Simovski had made a calculation, that the number of Macedonians was 326 426 and Macedonian moslems 41 000. (Т. Симовски, *Балканските и нивните реперкулсии положба на Егејска Македонија*, Гласник на ИНИ. XVI/3, Скопје 1972, 61 sq); И. Катариев, *Време на зреење*, II, Мисла, Скопје 1983, 95 sq.

pression of the Macedonian people and ban on public expression of the Macedonian national feeling, started implementing and resolving the Macedonian issue by colonisation, as most efficient, most secure and most permanent solution. The implementation of this policy to a greater extent was simplified and eased by, at that time, created historical conditions, of which Greece took maximum advantage.

With the Neuilly Peace Agreement (1919) and the Treaty for "volunteer" exchange of the population between Bulgaria and Greece, which resulted from the Agreement, as well as with the Lausanne Agreement (1923), and the Treaty for "compulsory" exchange of the population between Greece and Turkey, started the massive colonisation of the Aegean part of Macedonia. The implemented exchange based on these two Treaties, as well as the internal colonisation that was done by the Greek state, enabled Greece within less than ten year period (1919-1928) to cause changes in the ethnic structure of the population in the Aegean part of Macedonia and especially in its central and eastern areas.<sup>2</sup> With the moving out of 436 582 persons of the Aegean part of Macedonia (of which 127 384 were Macedonians by nationality) in Bulgaria and Turkey, and moving in of 618 199 persons of Greek and non-Greek Christian population into the Aegean part of Macedonia, the ethnic compactness of Macedonian people to a great extent was broken.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, "with the created ethnic changes, Macedonian people lost its traditional historical status. From nation (in majority) in its own native country, it turned into minority with all national, political and economic consequences".<sup>4</sup>

Parallel with the implementation of the colonisation, the Greek authorities had also strengthened the policy of compulsory hellenization of the Aegean part of Macedonia. With a separate law brought in 1926 all names of towns, villages, settlements, mountains, rivers and personal names got Greek feature and character.<sup>5</sup> With the assimilation of Macedonian people and imposing of Greek consciousness, Greece started using very skillfully the schools, the church, the army as well as the press, and thus in the years to come the Macedonian population that was exposed to strong political and economic pressure, was driven into a situation of convulsive fight for preserving its own national identity.

The situation of Macedonian people in this part of Macedonia significantly had aggravated when in 1936 general Ioannis Metaxas appeared on the Greek political scene as a dictator.<sup>6</sup> Compared to the conducted repression over Macedonian people

<sup>2</sup> Т. Симовски, *Миграционите движења етничкиот состав на нацелението во Воденската околија* (1912-1940), – Гласник на ИНИ., XIII/1-2 Скопје 1969, 57-85; Idem, *Миграционите движења од 1912-1971 и реперкусите врз измените на етничкиот состав во Егејска Македонија*, Погледи XIV/1-2, Скопје 1977, 109-134; С. Киселиновски, *Грчката колонизација*, р.11; Idem, *Статусот на македонскиот јазик*, р. 27; И. Катариев, *Време на зреење*, II, р. 95; С. Киселиновски, *Егејскиот дел на Македонија*, р. 25,29.

<sup>3</sup> С. Киселиновски, *Грчката колонизација*, р. 90, 130, 168.

<sup>4</sup> С. Киселиновски, *Егејскиот дел на Македонија*, р. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Т. Н. Веселин, *Населените места в Тракија и Македонија под грчка власт*, София 1941, р. 9; С. Киселиновски, *Грчката колонизација*, р. 137.

<sup>6</sup> Г. Д. Киприякидис, *Греция во Второй мировой войне*, Изд. Наука, Москва 1967, 34; С. Киселиновски, *Егејскиот дел на Македонија*, р. 45.

until that period, he made few steps further. Firmly determined to put an end to this national problem which obsessed Greece for a long time, the dictatorship regime started carrying out until then unseen pressure and terror over the Macedonian population. In order to remove the basic national feature of the Macedonian people – its language, it was forbidden by law for use not only in everyday life, but even in the homes and the family.<sup>7</sup>

And while Ioannis Metaxas was carrying out "a regime of firm hand" in Greece, Europe was coping with World War II, and on the borders of the Greek state appeared fascist Italy. Mussolini's plans to become a master of the Mediterranean, were no longer only an idea. They started with practical implementation of that idea. In this new situation in Europe, Metaxas had only one wish, to keep Greece outside of any military grouping, and therefore, immediately after beginning of the war, he, with the support from Germany, declared the neutrality of Greece. In fact, at that given moment, this was the only way in which militarily weak Greece could protect itself from Italy's aspirations.<sup>8</sup>

But in the summer of 1940, the Greek Government had to face the fact that Italy's claims towards Greece did not weaken, but day after day they became stronger. Italy had already made certain claims before the Greek Government for territorial retreats, and out in the Aegean Sea made open military provocations. Thus, in the month of August in 1940, Italian planes bombarded Greek ships, and Italian submarines torpedoed the Greek cruiser "Elli". Having the inclination to keep the proclaimed neutrality and stay out of the European clash, the Greek Government avoided all measures which could have the appearance of a challenge for Italy. Therefore, the protest for the torpedoing of the cruiser was omitted, and there was only an official statement saying that the submarine belonged to an unknown state. For the same reasons the necessary mobilisation was not carried out at all.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the more and more aggressive attitude of Italy towards Greece, the Greek Government had great hopes in Hitler's promises, that Italy would not attack Greece. However, the development of the war situation in Europe and the long-term idea to appear as conqueror of the Balkans before his alliance partner, was haunting Mussolini independently and without Hitler's knowledge to start military operations in order to occupy Greece. On October 15th 1940 the Italian Government brought a decision to perform a military attack on Greece, of which decision Hitler was informed in the last moment, when there existed no real possibilities for the attack to be prevented.<sup>10</sup>

All hopes that Greece would be spared of Italian aggression disappeared on the night of 27th-28th October 1940, when the Italian Government through its ambas-

<sup>7</sup> AM фонд: Разни материјали за Граѓанската војна и НОБ, К. 17, АЕ: 39. Cf; С. Благоев, *Отпорот на Македонците за време на Метаксаовата диктатура*, Културен живот 7-8, Скопје 1985, 32; С. Киселиновски, *Егејскиот дел на Македонија*, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Г. Д. Кипрjакидис, *Греција*, p. 43 sq.

<sup>9</sup> W. H. McNeill, *The Greek Dilemma*, Victor Collank, LTD, London 1947, p. 32; C. Cruickhank, *Greece 1940-1941*, "Davis-Poynter", London 1976, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> *Drugi Svetski Rat 1939-1945*, knj. I, "Mladost", Beograd 1969, p. 178.

sador in Athens, Mr. Graciani, handed over an ultimatum to Ioannis Metaxas, in which were required territorial retreats on the side of Greece and in favour of Italy. The refusal to accept the ultimatum marked the beginning of the Greek-Italian War.<sup>11</sup>

Italian military troops supported by the aviation, the same day, early in the morning started the penetration into Greek territory on the line Grammos – the coastline of the Ionian Sea, in accordance with the Italian military plan “Emergenza G”.<sup>12</sup> In the situation of the beginning of the war, the Greek Government declared state of war in Greece against Italy and began with carrying out of general mobilisation of the armed forces.

The initial war operations were undertaken in Epirus and Pindus, and performed in the manner of blitz-war, enabled the Italian military forces to deeply penetrate into Greek territory and at the same time separate the militarily weak Greek forces in Epirus of those which were stationed in northern-western part of Macedonia. Thus, in the beginning of the month of November 1940, the Italian military troops found themselves 40 kilometers deep into the countryside of Greece.<sup>13</sup>

The beginning of the war and the development of the first military actions, with which Greece evidently quickly lost its independence, had initiated the consolidation of the Greek political powers. The need to protect the territorial integrity of the outside enemy, for a short period had united the political parties of the left and right wing and forced them to give complete support to the Greek Government in the war that started.<sup>14</sup>

In order to stop the quick progression of the Italian troops on the Greek territory, on November 3rd, the newly-gathered Greek forces performed concentric attack in the Pindus area, and after the heavy fighting with the enemy, succeeded in liberating several villages. Under the pressure of the bold and quick military actions of the Greek soldiers, the Italian troops of the Pindus area started retreating towards Albania, after they suffered heavy losses. The Greek armies taking advantage of the favourable situation on November 13th emerged at the Albanian border in the area between Erseka and Leskovik. Parallel with these actions, the Greek forces which were in the northern-western part of Macedonia started to attack and soon managed to conquer the heights of the upper flow of the Devol river.<sup>15</sup> In Epirus, the Greek soldiers successfully withstanding the sharp attacks by the enemy, on November 13th managed to throw away the enemy forces towards Calamas river, with what in

<sup>11</sup> More extensive information on the Greek-Italian war see in: W.H. McNeill, *The Greek Dilemma*, 32-37; Papagos, *Grčka u ratu (1940-1941)*, “Vojno Delo”, Beograd 1954, 253-300; *Drugi svetski rat (pregled ratnih operacija)*, knj. I, Vojno istorijski institut Jugoslovenske narodne armije, Beograd 1957, 263-446 г.; Г. Д. Киприякидис, *Греция*, р. 64-84; Х. Андоновски, *Македонците под Грција во борбата против фашизмот (1940-1941)*, ИНИ, Скопје 1968, р. 28-39; *Drugi svetski rat, 1939-1945*, knj. I, 177-184; Т. Царидис, *Итало-гръцката война 1940-1941*, Военно-исторически сборник МНО – Генерален Штаб 4, София 1968, р. 39-60; С. Cruickshank, *Greece 1940-1941*, р. 9-73.

<sup>12</sup> С. Cruickshank, *Greece 1940-1941*, р. 32.

<sup>13</sup> *Drugi svetski rat 1939-1945*, knj. I, р. 178.

<sup>14</sup> С. Киселиновски, *Егејскиот дел на Македонија*, р.128.

<sup>15</sup> *Drugi svetski rat 1939-1945*, knj. I, р. 181; С. Cruickshank, *Greece 1940-1941*, р. 46.

this area conditions for crossing over and performing of comprehensive counter-offensive were created. The first initial successes, the Greek Supreme Command timely used for transferring of the troops to the Albanian front-line, in order to suppress the Italian forces out of Greek territory and to continue the military operations in the direction of Valona. In this way within 18 days of the beginning of the war attack over Greece, along the whole front-line the superior enemy was driven into a situation of necessary defence.<sup>16</sup>

In further military activities performed in the period between November 14th to 22nd, the Greek army leading the bold counter-offensive penetrated in the Albanian territory, and at the same time took over the town of Korcha, the third by importance Italian base in Albania.<sup>17</sup>

The successfully performed operations made possible the continuation of the offensive, and thus by December 28th, the Greek soldiers conquered the towns Argyrokastron and Permeti, and showed up at the line Podgradec-Himara. At this line the penetration of the Greek forces was stopped by the bad weather conditions and because of the feeling of exhaustion among the soldiers which was felt after the military operations they performed. Italy, meanwhile, refreshed its own forces by sending new armies on the frontline, but despite that, part of the Greek army on January 10th 1941 succeeded in conquering Klisura.<sup>18</sup>

The unexpected events at the Albanian front-line led Mussolini in complete confusion. His plan for conquering Greece, was not only non-feasible, but he was also brought in a position to protect his previously achieved success – the already occupied Albania. The new Italian offensive, which started on March 9th and lasted until March 25th 1941, was one more fanatic move of Mussolini, which led to direct and overall failure. The Greek army, arisen with the previous successes, rejected this final Italian attack performed by the already extremely demobilised Italian army.<sup>19</sup>

After this Italian Offensive came a period of complete stabilising of the front-line, which stayed in this same unchanged condition until the German attack over Greece and Yugoslavia.

In the five-month Greek-Italian War, the meagerly armed Greek army, under the leadership of general Papagos showed exemplary bravery, perseverance and capability, not only to confront and defend from the enemy, but also to suppress and prevail with its occupied territories. Italy with this war suffered unexpected defeat, and due to this defeat later even Germany was forced to intervene.

Macedonian people of the Aegean part of Macedonia, in conditions of military conflict between Italy and Greece, quite realistically chose side and orientation in the new situation. Despite the longstanding repressive politics conducted by the Greek authorities, especially during the period of Metaxas dictatorship, in this new,

<sup>16</sup> Drugi svetski rat 1939-1945, knj. I, p. 181.

<sup>17</sup> Г. Д. Киприякидис, *Греция*, p. 75-76; X. Андоновски, *Македонците под Грција*, p. 31; Т. Царидис, *Итало-гръцката война*, p. 53; C. Cruickshank, *Greece 1940-1941*, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Т. Царидис, *Итало-гръцката война*, p. 56; D. Kljakić, *Izgnubljena pobeda*, p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Drugi svetski rat 1939-1945, knj. I, 183.

war conditions did not take the role of the “fifth column”.<sup>20</sup> The Macedonian population mobilised among the Greek army took active part in the battles at Morava, Ivan Planina, Podgradec, Klisura and other places. Out of the total of 300 000 soldiers who participated in the Greek-Italian War, around 80 000 were from the Aegean part of Macedonia, and out of this number 20 000 were Macedonians. The war massively was assisted by the civilian Macedonian population of the border areas towards Albania, especially in the Kostur and Prespa area. Despite its orientation, the Metaxas regime during the war operations conducted additional internment of 1200 Macedonians to the harsh Greek islands, and at the same time 380 soldiers and noncommissioned officers were labeled as Communists, and from the first rows of the front-line they were sent to the islands of Tassos and Kefalonia.<sup>21</sup> Partaking in this war, the Macedonian people had made its contribution in the general fight of the anti-fascist forces against fascism.

## MACEOŃCZYCY I WOJNA GRECKO-WŁOSKA (1940-1941)

### Streszczenie

Układ w Lozannie z 1923 r. zobowiązał Grecję i Turcję do wymiany ludności. Rezultatem tego była m. in. kolonizacja Macedonii, która zmieniła dotychczasowy układ etniczny w tym regionie. Na podstawie prawa z 1926 r. wprowadzono greckie nazwy miejscowości, rzek, gór, jezior itd. Greckie były też szkoły, cerkwie, wojsko. Położenie ludności macedońskiej pogorszyło się jeszcze, gdy w 1936 r. objął dyktatorskie rządy generał Ioanis Metaxas. Używanie języka macedońskiego zostało wówczas prawnie zabronione i to nie tylko w urzędach, ale i w domach. W Grecji trwały więc rządy twardej ręki w momencie, gdy u jej granic znalazły się faszystowskie Włochy. Pod wpływem Niemiec Grecja ogłosiła neutralność. Mimo to latem 1940 roku nie słabły pretensje i prowokacje Włoch wobec Grecji. Interwencja dyplomacji greckiej u Hitlera nie przyniosła rezultatu. W nocy z 27 na 28 października 1940 roku ambasador włoski Atina-Grazziani wręczył Metaxasowi ultimatum z żądaniem ustępstw terytorialnych. Nieprzyjęcie ultimatum oznaczało wybuch wojny. Na początku listopada wojska włoskie wkroczyły już na 40 km w głąb Grecji. Dnia 3 listopada wojska greckie podjęły skoncentrowany atak w okręgu Pindos, zdobywając kilka wsi, a 13 listopada znalazły się na granicy albańskiej pomiędzy Ereską a Leskovikiem. Z drugiej strony przez Macedonię dotarły do rzeki Devol. W tym samym czasie rozpoczęły też kontrofensywę w Epirze. Pomiędzy 14 a 22 listopada armia grecka wkroczyła do Albanii, zajmując najważniejszą bazę włoską – miasto Korça. Do 28 grudnia zajęła kolejne miejscowości do linii Podgradec – Himara. W styczniu 1941 r., mimo kontrofensywy włoskiej, Grecy zdobyli Klisurę. Kolejna kontrofensywa włoska w marcu 1941 r. ustabilizowała sytuację na froncie; utrzymała się ona do ataku niemieckiego na Grecję i Jugosławię.

Mimo polityki represji w dobie dyktatury Metaxasa, MaceoŃczycy nie odegrali roli „piątej kolumny”. Zmobilizowani do wojska uczestniczyli w bitwach nad Morawą, pod Ivan Planiną, Podgradcem, Klisurą. Spośród 300 000 żołnierzy greckich 80 000 pochodziło z Macedonii egejskiej, a 20 000 było MaceoŃczykami. Również cywile, zwłaszcza na pograniczu albańskim, byli zaangażowani w wojnę. Mimo to 1200 MaceoŃczyków zostało osadzonych na wyspach greckich, a 380 żołnierzy i podoficerów uznanych za komunistów zostało wywiezionych na Tasos i Kefalonię.

<sup>20</sup> С. Киселиновски, *Егејскиот дел на Македонија*, p.128-129.

<sup>21</sup> Ѓ. Абаџев, Д. Зографски, А. Митрев, М. Керамитчиев, *Егејска Македонијана во нашата национална историја*, ИНИ, Скопје 1951, p. 386-387; *Историја на македонскиот народ*, кн. 3, НИП „Нова Македонија“, Скопје 1969, 274-275.