

**NAME DISPUTE BETWEEN  
GREECE AND MACEDONIA**

(STUDENT PROJECT)

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*I had the chance to see works of Macedonian art,  
beautiful icons and ceramics from Ohrid and other places.  
I am especially touched by the survival of Macedonia,  
which has been surrounded by stronger neighbors  
for centuries...*

***Martin Bernal***  
*April 2009*



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2

**CULTURAL AND POLITICAL  
DIMENSION OF THE DISPUTE**

MINORITY RIGHTS IN GREECE  
THE MACEDONIAN PRIMER

*Being concerned with your historical past is a quality of a civilized world. It  
is the basis of identity. We should enter Europe as Macedonians, not  
otherwise.*

**Nikola Gruevski**, May 2008

**ABECEDAR:  
MACEDONIAN PRIMER FOR AEGEAN  
MACEDONIANS<sup>205</sup>**

Today, only one sample remains of the original edition of the first primer for Macedonian children “Abecedar”, published 83 years ago in Greece. This book is preserved in a special depot at the Macedonian Archives and probably, it is one of the three samples left from the time when the entire edition was destroyed in 1925.

This schoolbook was preserved owing to Vangel Ajanovski – Oche, famous Macedonian revolutionary from Aegean Macedonia, who donated the schoolbook to the Archive about 30 years ago. Ajanovski received the book at the end of the World War II (1945) from a Macedonian teacher from Aegean Macedonia who managed to save it. At the end of the seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he decided to donate his entire personal archives, kept by his family and himself for more than four decades, to the state institution. Ajanovski established the Macedonian Anti-Fascist Organization (MAO) and the Secret Liberation Macedonian Organization (SLMO) in region around Edessa (Voden), during the World War II (1939-1945).

According to our information, the other two samples of the primer remain in the Vienna City Library (Austria) and the National Library in Athens (Greece). Macedonians from Greece used the original sample from Athens to make a copy of the primer that was recently promoted in the capital of Greece.

This primer, intended to educate Macedonian children, is now one the most significant proofs for the presence of Macedonians in Greece, which has been persistently denied by Greek authorities. The book was printed in Athens in 1925 as a result of the request by the League of Nations to provide protection of Macedonian minority in Greece. On August 10, 1920 Greece signed an agreement before the League of Nations for providing civil rights to Greek citizens that are not of Greek ethnic origin. The agreement signed in Sevres, France stipulated that different nationalities live in Greece and that the Greek Government shall provide them the basic national rights.

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<sup>205</sup> These readings were compiled and selected by D. Apasiev from different resources for the requirements of this project.

The story of the primer ended tragically – the entire printed edition was incinerated and destroyed in a staged attack of the train that transported it to the places populated by Macedonians in Greece. Georgi Ajanovski, famous Macedonian journalist, points out that his father Vangel got the primer by chance: “*It had happened in 1944 or 1945, when he met one of the teachers that worked in Macedonian schools. My father told me that the teacher had wanted the primer to be used for education of the youngest Macedonian generations in other parts of Macedonia. Then, there was no such schoolbook that could be used for the children’s education.*” – Ajanovski says. He adds that this sample of the primer was probably saved by people who first approached the fired train where the entire edition was placed.

Today, this sample is well protected. Petar Zajkovski, head of the Archives Protection Department at the State Archives of the Republic of Macedonia, says that the primer is preserved in special conditions: “*The primer is in good state owing to the conditions provided at the Archives. The bookbinding is protected with special paper resistant to external influences*” – Zajkovski says.

This primer, entitled *Abecedar*, was first issued in Athens in 1925 due to the Macedonian ethnic minority recognition in Greece after the World War I. The primer that never actually got to the Macedonian kids in Greece was recently reissued in Thessalonica after 83 years.

The primer from 1925 was written in Aegean Macedonian dialect and printed in Latin alphabet because the Greek authorities wanted to create a difference between Macedonian, Serbian and Bulgarian.

In 1920, the League of Nations initiated numerous agreements that referred to minority protection in different European states. They stipulated the obligations of states to provide civil and political equality of minorities. On August 10, 1920 the Great Powers and Greece signed an Agreement for protection of non-Greek ethnic minorities in Greece. This Agreement was named as the Treaty of Sevres and it guaranteed the right of minorities in Greece the free use of their mother tongue in private and official communication.

The *Abecedar* was promoted in Athens, in Thessalonica and other cities populated by Macedonians. Large and visible police security was present at each of these events in order to prevent possible clash with Greek chauvinist manifestants.

Athanasios Parisi, President of the Greek Committee at the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages stated for the Macedonian daily newspaper *Dnevnik* that the reissue of the *Abecedar* is a genuine proof that Greece failed at denying the existence of Macedonians.

The reissue of the *Abecedar* was supported by European and Greek Bureau for Lesser Used Languages and the “Rainbow” party, established by Macedonians in Greece and member of the European Free Alliance.

The new edition of the primer is comprised of two parts:

1. The first part is an identical copy of the *Abecedar* from 1925 that was targeted at the Macedonian population in North Greece. In that time, the European states from the League of Nations pressured Greece to issue a Macedonian primer. Unfortunately the *Abecedar* never got to Macedonian kids and was confiscated and destroyed by Greek authorities immediately after the printing.

The book comprises the history of the primer from 1925, the opening speeches of the presidents of European Bureau for Lesser Used languages and the Greek Committee of EBLUS, the certificate of gratitude of the Rainbow members to the Greek Government for its contribution to this project. Namely, part of the finances that Rainbow received from the lawsuit at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg that was resolved in favor of Rainbow (for the exposure of the bilingual board in Florina/Lerin in 1995) were used to print this book. The articles in the primer are written in three languages: Greek, Macedonian and English.

2. The second part of this issue contains a modern primer of the contemporary Macedonian language, as it is studied all around the world. The primer has already been distributed in Greece. The promotion is planned to be in November, in Athens, Thessalonica and all larger Greek cities populated by Macedonians.

On behalf of the European Free Alliance, Bernat Joan Mari and the co-director of EFA – Gunther Dauwen, on September 13, 2006 on the press-conference in Florina/Lerin concluded that “...*history is tough burden for the peace life among the people who speak Greek and Macedonian*”. EFA held several official and unofficial meetings with national, regional and local representatives of the Greek Government and with members from Rainbow, party that represents Macedonian minority in Greece.

During the visit to Greece, Macedonia and Bulgaria the delegation was focused on the linguistic rights of Macedonian speaking populations outside the Republic of Macedonia. The delegation realized that issue is sensitive because the meeting with the state official representatives was filled with historical positions and discussions about the number of the Macedonian speaking population.

According to the official Greek representatives, Macedonian language, Macedonians, and Macedonian alphabet do not exist in Greece. The Muslim is the only minority living in Greece. The representatives from Rainbow, the party that represents Macedonians in Greece, were not allowed to participate at this meeting.

The local representatives of the municipalities in the Lerin area, the prefect of Lerin and the MPs from this region accepted to meet with EFA and Rainbow delegations. However, they only copied the directives from Athens and limited their comments to denying of Macedonian existence in Greece.

Berat Joan Mari, Member of the European Parliament and sociolinguist, made the following comment: *“It is unacceptable and counterproductive to deny the existence of Macedonian people and their language. We call upon the Greek authorities to make census and allow all the citizens to freely declare their relationship with their language and culture. After the census, the Government should do as much as possible to meet the linguistic rights of all Greek citizens speaking Macedonian language”*.

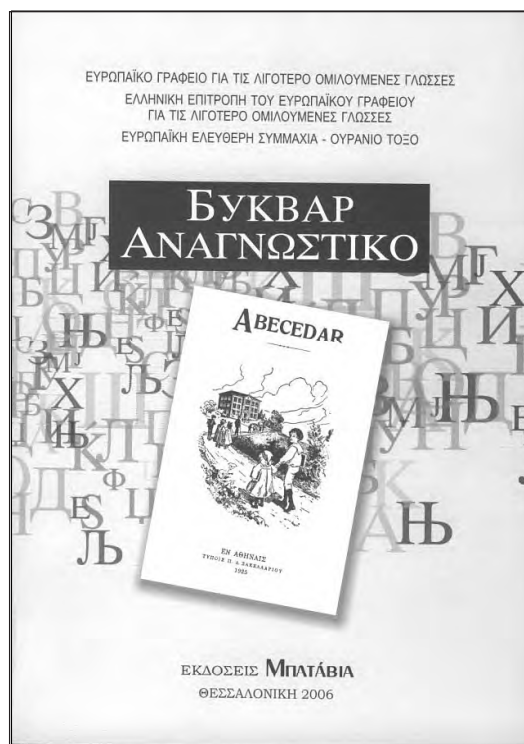
Gunther Dauwen, co-director of EFA stated: *“EFA supports Rainbow’s plans to reissue the primer written in Macedonian language and alphabet that the Greek state officially issued in 1925. This official book could help the establishment of a bilingual education in Northern Greek regions, where Macedonian language is spoken.”*

EFA encourages the Greek Government to recognize the real differences and meet minority rights according to the European values.

Mr. Haralambos G. Manesis, Greek Ambassador to the OSCE was the first representative of the Greek state that received a copy of the Macedonian primer during the annual OSCE Conference entitled Human Dimension Implementation meeting that was held in Warsaw. This initiative of EFA – Rainbow, which was welcomed by other delegations, was a reply to recent statements made by the Greek Government that there is no Macedonian primer yet.

In the presence of fifty member-states and numerous non-governmental delegations, the EFA – Rainbow representative, stated the following: *“As members of the Macedonian minority in Greece, we have taken the first step towards recognition of Macedonian language in our country by issuing this primer. Even though we believe that the Greek state should have taken this initiative, which represents standard international practice, we will continue to stimulate the Government to finally introduce Macedonian language in the public education system.”*

The Delegations of EFA Rainbow and the Home of Macedonian Culture pointed out at the working session for ethnic minorities at the OSCE conference that Greece still implements unacceptable politics regarding ethnic and linguistic differences. EFA – Rainbow would like to hope that this symbolic gesture and the reissue of the Macedonian primer will make the Greek state question its politics and at least adopt international democratic experiences about human and minority rights protection.



*New edition of the ABECEDAR from 2006, printed by Rainbow in Thessalonica with the finances received from the Greek Government due to the lawsuit at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (France).*