

THE MACEDONIAN 'ISSUE' IN ITS AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

The FYROM nation is living a lie and usurping Macedonian history and culture!

The last of the series of the Macedonian lectures in English took place on Wednesday evening 15 July, at the Pan-Corinthian Association Hall at Campsie.

This initiative has been organised by the Greek Australian Professionals' Association (GAPA) in conjunction with the Australian Hellenic Educators' Association (AHEA) and has been a series of four lectures since March this year.

President of GAPA (Greek Australian Professional Association) Ms Kathy Kouvas, welcomed everyone at the last lecture on ancient Macedonia and the modern so called "Macedonian"/ "Skopian" issue or better "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (FYROM) issue that is of high interest to the local Macedonians and to all Hellenes in general. Ms Kouvas said that it was important to provide continued enlightenment on this national issue for Greeks around the world, so the Macedonian issue can be put into its right context. Ms Kouvas mentioned also other initiatives of GAPA on previous lectures that took place recently, that is, lectures on the Olympic Games, the Parthenon marbles and Sparta which also provided continuous enlightenment on some of their controversial aspects.

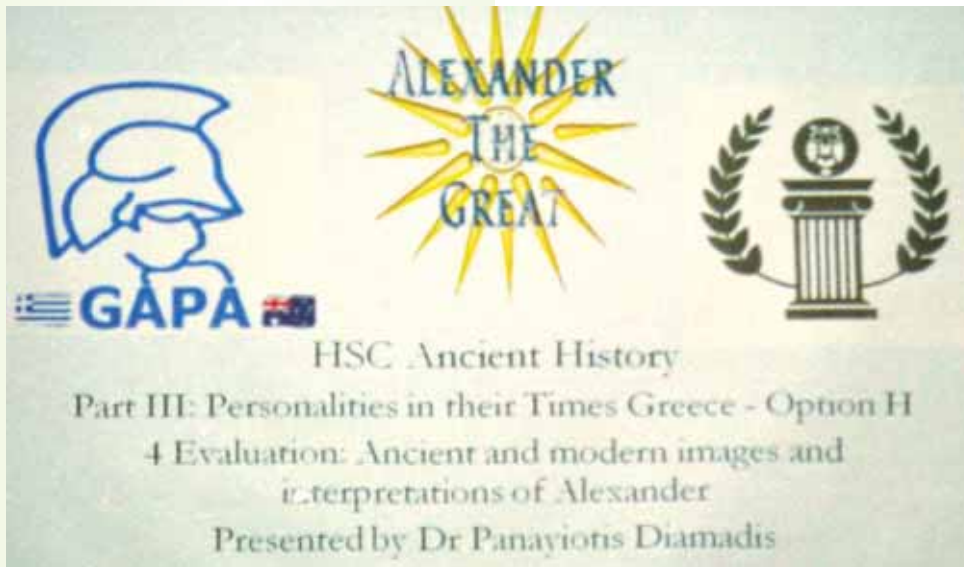
Ms Kouvas welcomed the speaker, Dr Panayiotis Diamadis, an experienced History teacher and well known figure in the Greek community of Australia to deliver his talk "The 'Macedonian' issue in its Australian context".

During his multimedia slide presentation with invaluable visual evidence, Dr Diamadis revealed many poignant related issues that have been the cause for the tensions between the Yugoslavian Macedonians and the Macedonian Hellenes breaking up his talk in five major areas, commencing with the first clashes between pro-Bulgarian Yugoslavs and Greeks in 1930-1934.

Some of the most important points that he made reference to were about the first slavomacedonian organisations 1943-1941; the impact of the Greek civil war during 1944-1949 and the hatred instilled in the children of those refugees who had to be transported on the other side of the "Iron Curtain" in the northern communist countries as the communists lost control in Greece and the developments of the issue until now. Some anti-Greek Greek migrants also were partly responsible for the "Macedonian issue" at its early development, being pro-Bulgarian and affected by the Greek civil war.

As a synopsis, it was in Perth, in 1930 that first Macedonian (Hellenic) brotherhood was founded by Hellenes from the Kastoria and Florina prefectures in north western Macedonia region. These members were bilingual; they spoke Greek and 'po nashi', a local Slavic dialect. In 1932 pro-Bulgarian Slav members amongst the Hellenes started "to stir the situation" talking about "Macedonian" peoples, with a different consciousness, resulting in fist fights amongst the Greeks and pro-Bulgarians. The latter's leader was Kiro Angelkov, a person from north western Macedonia, in northern Greece.

In Werribee town, outside Melbourne in Victoria, Macedonians founded the Macedonian Association causing splits a-



mongst the Macedonian Hellenes and pro-Bulgarian Slavs.

The first Bulgaromacedonian Association "Todor Aleksandrov" was founded in Melbourne in January 1934 and its first president was Christos (Risto in Bulgarian) Avramon from Polypotamo village in Florina prefecture, north western Macedonia region.

The first Slavomacedonian socialist organisation was formed in Perth in September 1939 named "Edinstvo" ("Unity"), laying the foundations for the slavomacedonian community to start to develop itself in the Antipodes.

In Melbourne in 1942, the Pan-Slav Unity League was formed which included Czechoslovaks, Russians and Slavomacedonian socialists. From Melbourne, more branches were founded in Sydney.

Adelaide in South Australia also saw a new club formed in 1940, the "Macedonian Balkan Club", with its first president being Stavros Vasiliou. This organisation included Yugoslavs and Greeks.

Dr Diamadis presented the first Slavomacedonian newspaper "Makedonska iskra" ("Macedonian spark") which was using the Cyrillic Bulgarian alphabet but later changed it to their own, when the so called "slavomacedonian" dialect was proclaimed as a language and some minor changes to letters were made to differentiate it from its maternal language, Bulgarian.

The titles and reports of the then Australian based newspapers are quite revealing as they indicate the community's Slavic roots and not any pseudo ideas of ancient Macedonian Hellenic ones, such as "Slav Macedonian Congress Territory of free Greece" and "National Liberation of Slav Macedonians".

The presenter also made references to Marshall Jozip Tito, the then Yugoslav leader, whose undercurrent and overt aims in his policies were to have access to the Aegean Sea through the Macedonian city of northern Greece, Thessaloniki as well as Kavala, therefore creating a nation in his then Yugoslavia for a possible future use: 'the yearning for and the expansion to the south'.

Other interesting points made were the alerting of the Greek government in 1950 by a Melbourne based Greek newspaper about the suspicious movements of the Yugoslavian community gathering money for an autonomous "Macedonia" country in Yugoslavia. These calls from the Greek

The presenter said that currently in Australia there over 20 Slavomacedonian Orthodox churches in Australia and even within this community there are splits amongst church members as far as which Archbishop should have control of the ecclesiastical properties. However, a major point was made and that was that the so called "Macedonian" Orthodox Church, which evolved from the Archdiocese of Ohrid is a non-canonical church. It is a renegade church from the canonical Serbian Orthodox Church and it is not recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and therefore by other Orthodox Christian churches.

Sveta Petka Orthodox Church at Rockdale in Sydney's south has been a controversial one as clashes recently have occurred about its ownership. Additionally it should be noted that the hall foyer of the church displays a map of "Greater

Macedonia", including parts of Albania, Bulgaria and all of Macedonia region, northern Greece, pointing out once again that the propaganda amongst the community members of irredentist dreams for a land that does not belong to them is alive and provokes the Macedonian Hellenes and Greeks in general.

At the end of the presentation, many questions were raised and responded to concerning the recent events of the Macedonian issue as well as its future prospects.

Mr Dimitrios Kametopoulos, Vice-President of the Australian Hellenic Educators' Association thanked on behalf Dr Diamadis for his invaluable contribution to the community with the provision of vital evidence and well researched points on the "FYROM issue" in Australia. He said that there is no doubt that the developments in the Balkans, in south east Europe, have side-effects in the local diaspora communities, whether these communities are Macedonian Hellenes and Greeks in general or from the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia. Mr Kametopoulos said it was of paramount importance to be tuned into events so that people are informed and that the research facts rather than rely on pseudo information sources. Lastly he also advertised the upcoming Sydney 2009 16th Greek-Serbian Orthodox Friendship Festival in late October showcasing the bonds between the Greek and Serbian nations and local communities, an example of how two communities work well in the Diaspora and share their culture and music with respect and appreciation. He hoped that the local Greek community and the one emanating from the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia can harmonize their relationships based on respect for their culture and history and advance a spirit for mutual cooperation.

Ms Kouvas presented Dr Diamadis with a gift as a token of appreciation for his volunteering for the past events within GAPA.

At the end of the formalities, GAPA offered refreshments allowing for audience members to further analyse the issue. Events of GAPA can be accessed via its website: www.gapa.com.au

"For Macedonia is Hellas also",
Strabo, ancient Greek historian, 6th century BC

Diaspora though 'fell onto deaf ears', up until the visit of the President of the Hellenic Republic, Christos Sartzetakis in Australia during its 1988 bicentennial year for the opening of the Macedonian antiquities exhibition in Sydney, as Greece released for the first time ever its Macedonian treasurers outside its territory as a gift to the Australian peoples. During the visit, some members of the Yugoslav Macedonian community attacked the Greek president, hurling objects at him and made defamatory comments about Greece. It was then that Greece was made aware of the issue in the Antipodes.

Dr Diamadis used also excerpts from the local Greek newspapers "Kosmos" and "Ellinikos Kirikas" ("Greek Herald"), the local slavomacedonian newspapers "Denes" ("Today") & "Avstralisko Makedonski Nedelnik" ("Australian "Macedonian" Weekly") and the local "St George Leader" that have been carrying reports and photos of the provocations on this national issue at soccer matches or demonstrations. One characteristic local example is the tampering of the Greek flag in red and yellow colours carrying an insignia "Former Macedonian Republic of Greece" 'Poraneshna Makedonska Republika Greija', provoking the Greek peoples.

