

# *The Solun Assassins*



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(Translated from Macedonian to English and  
edited by Risto Stefov)

# The Solun Assassins

Published by:

Risto Stefov Publications  
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Toronto, Canada

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e-book edition

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August 18, 2017

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In honour of Macedonian Army Day

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I would like to dedicate the translated version of this book to my friends in the Macedonian military and to all Macedonian officers and soldiers who fought and are fighting to protect Macedonia and the Macedonian people.

Risto

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## PREFACE

A number of events during the pre-Ilinden period, more or less, revealed to Europe and to the world that a revolutionary movement was brewing in Macedonia and foretold of the storm that was about to explode in this backward, politically disadvantaged and exploited Ottoman province. The Vinitsa and a number of other failures, the conflicts between the Macedonian armed bands and the Ottoman army, the terror perpetrated by the Ottoman authorities against the Macedonian population, all appeared as normal occurrences of a deep revolutionary situation causing many problems inside and outside of Macedonia. The Solun assassinations, carried out several months before the Ilinden Uprising, were very bloody and serious enough to get the attention of the European public and the diplomatic circles in Europe.

The bombings were the work of the Gemidzhii (boatmen, sailors), a small group of people composed mainly of young men, hoping that, through a great struggle against the European establishment in Macedonia, they would force the European Great Powers to ensure Macedonia would be awarded its autonomy, which was promised to them under the 1878 Berlin agreement, and for which the Great Powers were morally responsible.

The entire Macedonian population in almost all of Macedonia had accepted the idea of Macedonia being liberated by revolutionary means. At the head of the revolutionary movement stood the Macedonian intelligentsia which believed that Macedonia's liberation could be achieved through long-term political and material preparations, i.e. through the conscious revolutionary action of the most disadvantaged and exploited people. However, there were some young people who were impatient and felt that individual revolutionary actions and self-sacrifice could replace the collective effort of the many people and thus save them from the consequences of a general and bloody uprising.

The Gemidzhii circle in Solun was a child of the times when the Macedonian people were organizing a mass struggle against their centuries-old oppressor... at the time when they were fighting to attain their national and social freedom. Beyond that, the Gemidzhii

circle was also a product of a time when anarchism in Europe was “fashionable”, a way of asserting rights and correcting wrongs.

Even though the Gemidzhii were influenced by European anarchist and nihilistic ideas, their attitudes and their revolutionary actions were different from those of the European anarchists. The Gemidzhii were extremely compassionate towards the innocent and subjugated population and always took care to minimize suffering caused by their actions. Their attacks were different, especially in their preparation. They never put their own lives ahead of others. They were never careless. They put a lot of effort into their preparations, lasting months and sometimes even years. More importantly they never hesitated to give up their own lives, after their work was done, to prove that they were not common terrorists but fighters fighting for the freedom of their homeland Macedonia.

The Gemidzhii neither could nor wanted to penetrate the essence of anarchist ideology. They were not interested in it. They were preoccupied with the question of how to do the job “easier” and “faster” and how to minimize casualties in the liberation of Macedonia. This is why they took the road that they did and the means they applied, which, according to them, would have given them the desired results.

The Gemidzhii were a small group of individuals consisting mostly of intellectuals supporting one another in their own little circle. They did not belong to any international organization, party or any part of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Everything they did was voluntary and was done under the disciplinary norms they themselves had created. Iordan Popiordanov-Ortse was recognized as the leader of the Gemidzhii circle, thanks to his character and traits. The main cohesive force that firmly connected the Gemidzhii was their fanatical devotion to their work. They felt responsible for one another and together were responsible for Macedonia’s liberation.

The Gemidzhii were a modest bunch, withdrawn, full of love for their people and full of hatred for the enemy. They were young with boundless courage. They did not think of life without freedom, they preferred death over slavery. Their sacrifices were made to convince

the people of Europe that a society able to give birth to such heroes was worthy of living a life of freedom.

They were preparing for one terrible thing; something that would upset and disturb Europe. They were preparing for a terrible act; to end life. The Gemidzhii worked like shadows always seeking to be anonymous. No one outside of the ten of them knew exactly what they were preparing for and who was going to do what. Very little was known about their ideals, determination and attitude to life and freedom.

They were prepared to sacrifice themselves for Macedonia and, except for their work, did not want to leave any trace of themselves in history. The Macedonian armed revolutionary bands, for example, always wanted to be photographed. They wanted to be seen in well-dressed revolutionary gear, well-armed, with big beards. They wanted to look “fearless”. The Gemidzhii, on the other hand, rather some of them, left only a photograph or two of themselves. But not Ortse, his character has remained completely unknown. There was no force that could make Ortse want to be in a picture. He wanted no portrait or memorial to be left behind after his death. “Let others speak of our deeds” he often used to say. This was the same with Kirkov and Meche...

The Gemidzhii usually solved their own problems personally that rose during their preparations for action. They did not take minutes during meetings and rarely corresponded with one another. The leadership of the entire “conspiracy” was placed in Ortse’s hands. It was his responsibility to maintain the links with Tsari Grad (Constantinople) and Sofia. He received money and shared it with his friends. In all this there were no documents or formalities. The Gemidzhii were faithful to fanaticism and to one another and did not feel they needed to be controlled. There were no documents proving their existence. They did not publish any brochures or newspaper, nor did they make any proclamations or anything similar to that through which to communicate their program and struggle to the public. Therefore it is very difficult to write about their actions and about their struggle.

Given the strict secrecy in their preparations for action and in their isolation (keeping to themselves), the only ones who could have had any information on the Gemidzhii would have to be the Gemizhii themselves. This was done by two of the surviving Gemidzhii, Pavel Shatev and Todor Organdziev.

The first author to write about the Gemidzhii was S. Simeonov with the publication of his booklet “The Solun Conspiracy” (Sofia, 1921). This author was the first writer to give a brief review of their terror acts in Solun, based on information obtained from the surviving Gemizhii Pavel Shatev and Todor Organdziev, who gave a short but personal account of most of the Gemidzhii.

Pavel Shatev’s accounts, recorded in 1908 by Liubomir Miletich, appeared in 1927 in Book VI of the famous series “Historical material about the Macedonian Liberation Movement”, published by the Macedonian Institute of Science in Sofia. There are actually a number of stories published in this book about the assassinations themselves, with extensive excerpts from P. Shatev’s book “Exile in Fezzan-Sahara” originally published in 1910. Shatev kept a diary during the trials. Then, based on his 250 page diary, he gave a poignant picture of the life of the convicted Gemidzhii and the fifty other Macedonian revolutionaries who were sent to exile in Fezzan-Sahara.

The Gemidzhii and their actions and consequences in the Solun assassinations were given a place of their own and viewed separately from the other revolutionary struggles for the first time by Hristo Silianov in his book “Osloboditeni Borbi na Makedonia” (Liberation struggles of Macedonia) (Volume I, Sofia, 1933).

Shatev’s memoirs, written by Shatev himself, sprang out in 1934 under the title “Bo Makedonia pod robstvo – So punsko szaklitie (1903)”.

Here Shatev objectively talks about the Gemidzhii and their actions in great detail, with some assessment about their circle and other tumultuous events of that period. Shatev was not one of those people who liked to talk about himself. The only time he talked about



himself was when describing the conflict between him and Ivan Garvanov.

Shatev's memoirs, like any other historical literature of this kind, have drawbacks. But despite this, his memoirs are the most important and basic source of first hand information on this important issue of our history. Outside of Simeonov's book, this was almost the only publicly available information available to us on the Gemidzhii until the end of the Second World War.

This, however, began to change after a number of diplomatic reports from the Solun, Bitola and Skopje consulates and the Catholic missions became public and available to science. These declassified documents dispatched by the consuls and Pisi, a Catholic missionary, were professionally prepared witness reports and highly valuable for the assessment of these events. This was the first time that a means was made available to us to verify the many events described by Shatev. Included among the publications that followed were the works of Professor Dancho Zografski's "Macedonian Secret Revolutionary Committee", Todor Organzhiev's short memoirs as well as several letters written by Mandzhukov and Ortse, which helped broaden and complement our knowledge and gave us new insights into the Gemidzhii and their actions.

All Macedonian generations have shown great interest in knowing more about the Gemidzhii and about the Solun assassinations. This book is a second attempt to satisfy that interest. (The first attempt was made by Iovan Pavlovski who wrote an extensive article entitled "The Gemidzhii" published by "Nova Makedonija" as a series of installments starting on January 25, 1980.) We are aware that, due to lack of sufficient archival and other material, we were unable to answer all the questions that surfaced during our research and all the gaps that opened up. But we did the best we could which means more remains to be done by future researchers.

We think the term "atentati" (assassins) to describe the Gemidzhii and their actions is inappropriate and inadequate. However, this is the term accepted by our people and we think that it should not be changed.

# PART ONE

## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE APPEARANCE OF THE GEMIDZHII CIRCLE

### EUROPEAN CAPITAL INVESTED IN MACEDONIA

Just before the Russo-Turkish War of 1877, the Ottoman state was facing financial bankruptcy. It was facing budget deficits, inability to pay the annuities and interest on its debts, a trade imbalance and increased costs to support its army and administration. Then, immediately after the Berlin Congress in 1878, the state went complete bankrupt. The European capitalists and creditors of the Ottoman state became very upset and looked for ways to recover their investments. One of the ways to do that was to recover the Ottoman economy.

The European creditors convened a meeting in September 1881 in Constantinople to discuss ways to recover their investments. Based on their discussions and findings during this meeting, in December 1881, the Sultan sanctioned a decree, known as the Muhareem decree. The Muhareem Decree basically gave the European capitalist complete control of the Ottoman finances and trade markets. According to this decree, by 1873, the Ottomans had amassed a debt of 117,081,000 in Turkish gold Lira. This was now due and owed to the European capitalists. As a result of this the Europeans were given the go ahead to form a “Council to control the state budget” in Constantinople with the ability to work independently of the Ottoman government and with the task of finding funds to pay back the loans. At the time the Ottoman state was not economically developed and the income it had was from its monopoly on salt and tobacco and from taxing basic agricultural products.

The Muhareem decree was a full victory for European investment and a full surrender of Ottoman finances and economy to foreign investors and bankers. The “Council to control the state budget” was allowed to introduce foreign financial control inside a sovereign

state. This foreign “Council” in fact directed all finances and economic life in the Ottoman state.

The foreign Council managed to put some order in the Ottoman finances. Up until 1880 no one really knew the exact amounts of state revenues and expenditures. The budget figures were more or less guesswork. The only thing the Sultans and their governments knew was that there was money or no money in the treasury. Starting in 1881 rough budgets began to appear with aims at balancing the state budget. But in order to do that, state revenues and expenditures needed to be clearly defined. In 1895, for example, the projected Ottoman state expenditures were as follows: military needs 7,756,000 gold lira, debt repayment needs 6,483,000 gold lira, administrative and management expenditures 3,828,000 gold lira, salary for the Sultan and his family 933,000 gold lira, subsidies to religious institutions 796,000 gold lira, education costs 50,000 gold lira, and healthcare costs 94,000 Turkish gold lira.

We can see from the above figures that a very large chunk of the state budget was dedicated to the military and debt repayment. In other words 14,239,000 out of 19,796,000 gold lira, or 84% of the total state budget went to maintaining the army and paying back the debt. Most of the budget (84%) was allocated to maintaining the administration, or non-productive functions, and only a small proportion (16%) of the state budget was spent on other programs with even a smaller portion (3%) going to social programs and productive purposes. Funds for infrastructure costs for building various state buildings, bridges, barracks, etc., were provided from exploiting the mainly working Christian population.

The main task of the Muhareem decree and the foreign Council was to find funds to pay the annuities and interest on the loans concluded from 1857 to 1873. However, the Ottoman state was also paying interest and depreciation on the loans concluded from 1874 to 1896 and other, more current, loans it signed with the Ottoman and other banks. The total payment of all debts paid by the Ottoman government annually was calculated to be about 6,400,000 Turkish gold liras. In other words the Ottoman government paid the European capitalists around 125,000,000 Turkish gold lira in a matter of two decades.

The European capitalists robbed the working people living under Ottoman rule not only through regular interest payments on the loans, but also directly through various joint stock companies and enterprises. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the European capitalists in the Ottoman state held in their hands 7 banks, 10 railroad companies, 10 ports, 5 mines, 4 tram companies, 5 hydroelectric and kerosene companies and 17 other companies. They owned a total of 54 companies worth 2 billion gold francs (1 Turkish lira = about 22.5 French gold francs). Those companies produced an annual income between 250 and 300 million gold francs.

The European capitalists also profited from trading with the Ottoman state. The Ottoman Empire was an excellent base for supplying European industry with raw materials and a spacious market for selling its manufactured goods. The European capitalists worked very diligently not to have their markets disrupted. In fact, not only were the Europeans not interested in industrializing the Ottoman state but it was against their interest to do so. The profits gained by foreign capitalists in their trade with the Ottoman state from 1884 to 1903 amounted to 176,230,000 Turkish gold lira.

With the enactment of the Muharem decree, commerce in Macedonia was subordinated to the laws that ruled in all parts of the Ottoman Empire. That meant that foreign capital had full domination over the entire state and guided all national and economic developments. As a result, the Ottoman Empire was led towards providing agricultural and other raw materials to the European industry and acquiring necessary finished products from abroad. This literally stunted the possibility of creating a local industry that would absorb domestic resources and at the same time produce for the domestic market.

This situation became more prevalent after the adoption of the Muhareem decree which allowed European capital to play a dominant role in the Ottoman economy and in the development of the Macedonian national economy. Fortunately, thanks to the more stable economic development that had taken place in Macedonia before the adoption of the Muhareem decree, the trade balance was either active or balanced. This can be seen from the numerous

reports generated by the various European consular representatives in Solun. For example, in 1864 imports in Macedonia amounted to 21,254,475 francs while exports amounted to 27,777,825; in 1865 imports amounted to 18,824,375, exports amounted to 29,832,775; in 1880 imports were 26,528,894, exports were 34,271,625; in 1881 imports were 30,851,850 and exports were 39,323,983. From 1864 to 1881, except for a few years, exports from Macedonia were regularly significantly larger than imports. But after the adoption of the Muhareem decree in 1881, the process began to reverse. In 1883 imports were already higher than exports; imports were 31,005,432 while exports were 29,763,800 francs. In 1884 imports were 45,761,600 while exports were 18,516,856. On average, in the twenty years (1864-1884) imports were nearly 29 million francs while exports amounted to about 33,111,000 francs.

In 1901 the passive trade balance in Macedonia was off by about 1,500,000 Turkish gold lira (33,750,000 francs). (Dino K'osev, History of the Macedonian national revolutionary movement, Sofia 1954 73-81; Alexander Matkovski and Poliksena Angelakova, Report from the French consul in Solun on the economic situation of Macedonia from 1882 until 1885 - Messenger of INI, XVI, 2, Skopje 1972 , 201.)

This brief overview highlights the influence European capital had on the economy in Macedonia and makes it easy to answer the question: “Why did the Gemidzhii decided to aim their bombs at European interests? And why did they do it in Solun?”

Solun during Ottoman rule was an important economic and administrative centre for the Ottoman Empire and for Macedonia. In addition to being the centre of all export-import traffic in Macedonia, it also housed Great Power and Balkan state general consulates as well as Western state trade offices and agencies. There were more companies and institutions that belonged to the European countries located in Solun than anywhere else in the Ottoman Empire. There were also various religious institutions, schools and associations managed and financed by the West and by the Balkan states. There were Jewish, Turkish, Greek, Bulgarian, Italian, French and other language schools. Solun was truly a cosmopolitan city.

The population of Solun was diverse. It is difficult, however, to determine how many people lived there in the days of the Gemidzhii because, as was for all of Macedonia, Ottoman demographic statistics were sketchy at best. Other people's statistics were also not reliable. The least objective of all were the statistics produced by the Greeks. According to Ottoman statistics 88,000 people lived in Solun in 1890. The same number was also recorded for 1898. But, in reality, Solun grew very rapidly in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and therefore the Ottoman statistics cannot be correct. According to statistics produced by Steg, the French consul general in Solun, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Solun had 120,000 inhabitants, of whom about 70,000 were Jews.

The French figures coincide with V. K'nchov's familiar statistics, according to which 118,000 inhabitants lived in Solun of whom 55,000 were Jews, 26,000 were Turks, 16,000 were Patriarchates (assumed to be Greeks), 10,000 Exarchates and 8,500 of various other nationalities, the greater part of them being French, Italian and other Western Europeans.

Solun may have been a predominantly Jewish city but its surroundings were largely Macedonian. According to Steg: "About 350,000 Christians lived in the Solun Vilayet, of whom 220,000 were Exarchates and 130,000 Patriarchates who spoke a Slavic idiom in their family life. If we listen to the majority of Serbian publicists, all these Slavs were attached to the Serbian nationality... If we listen to the Bulgarian publicists there is no doubt about the nationality and language of these Slavs from the Solun Vilayet, they are all connected to the same family as those in their Principality. But a few years later, a third opinion sprang out, mainly from Russia... but the truth is that the last (Slavs) are undoubtedly not related to either nationalities (Bulgarian and Serbian) and represent a separate branch of the great Slavic family... If we listen to the Greeks of today, they say that the Bulgarophones are completely Hellenized..."

The diplomats and many others, in most cases, categorized the Macedonian people by church affiliation and not by their Macedonian ethnicity. The Macedonians who were affiliated with the Patriarchate Church were recognized as "Greeks", those

affiliated with the Exarchate Church were recognized as “Bulgarians” and the supporters of the Serbian Church and propaganda schools were recognized as “Serbians”. Many often asked the question: “How could the same people belong to three or more nations?” Some even attempted to answer this question. They were aiding the wild propaganda led by Macedonia’s neighbouring countries struggling to win the souls of the Macedonian people. The Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian propagandists were satisfied with whatever was said as long as it aided their cause. They even viewed “church affiliation” as belonging to a “party”. But, being affiliated with a church or a party did not mean that the Macedonian people belonged to a particular nation outside of Macedonia. Steg estimated that, out of the 130,000 Macedonian Patriarchates there could be no more than 20,000 Hellenized people or people belonging to the Greek party in the Solun Vilayet.

A large number of Macedonians not only from Solun province, but also from all over Macedonia, began to settle in Solun at an accelerated rate, in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This process was not easy. The city’s Jewish community provided most of the jobs for this sizable surplus labour, but the space for the mostly unskilled Macedonian labour force was very narrow. In spite of this, diligent Macedonians from near and far who were craftsmen and traders, farmers and ordinary workers kept coming to the city creating compact Macedonian districts. Wealthy merchants associated with the European trade also settled in Solun.

The idea of Macedonians settling in Solun was not well accepted by the Greeks, according to their propaganda. Their arrival was not welcomed, initially, by the Greek colonists and later, when it was revealed that Solun was the centre of Macedonian revolutionary activities, by vitriolic Greek propaganda. The Greeks did everything in their power, under the circumstances, to deny the Macedonians their existence and to minimize their presence in Solun. Later, after the Solun assassinations took place, they even attempted to drive the Macedonian population out of Solun.

According to official demographic statistics, the number of Macedonians living in Solun in 1903 was approximately 1,200. According to Steg, even though there were many neighbourhoods

populated by Macedonians, no Macedonian was working as a “Muhtar” (official registrar). This function was performed by Greeks, and with every newborn registered they wrote down “Rumi”, meaning “Greek”. As a result only two births in a year were officially registered in the Macedonian neighbourhoods.

Most Macedonians moved to Solun, meaning they were not born in Solun. Official statistics, among other things, basically used births minus deaths to determine the numbers. The settlers were seen as “drifters” and were not counted as “permanent residents”. As a result no official data was collected on them, ethnic or religious.

Even though K’rchov was interested in identifying the Macedonian population and showing it in larger numbers, in his statistics he classified it as “Bulgarian”. His statistics however, compared to the others, even though more or less biased, are relatively more accurate. Therefore we can assume that the number of 10,000 Macedonians living in Solun given by K’rchov is a lot closer to the truth. (Vasil K’rchov, *Selected Works II*, Sofia 1970. 440, Archives of Macedonia, Skopje, film 238, French consulate in Solun, May 13, 1903; Krste Bitovski, *Contribution to the question of the number and national composition of the population in Macedonia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century*, Messenger of INI XXVI, 1, Skopje 1982, 181.)

Solun remained a constant in business and served as the import-export centre for Macedonia. It was the largest single gate through which European capital came in and left our country. The general turnover of import-export trade in 1888 was valued to be around 53,480,000 francs. The countries included in this trade were France, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Romania, Spain and others. The top trader in goods and shipping was France. Import and export goods transported by French ships amounted to 13,127,264 francs. The other countries did less.

The vast majority of this trade was accomplished by ship. In 1889, for example, 1,254 steamships and 7,364 sailing ships passed through the port of Solun. The largest number of sailing ships that passed through were Turkish (6,574) and Greek (791). The largest number of steamships were French (398), followed by Turkish (250), English (236) and so on. In terms of goods transported, the



French were first (544,766 tons) followed by the English (252,712 tons) and so on. (Alexander Matkovski and Poliksena Angelakova, Reports from the French Consulate in Solun from 1887 to 1889 - Messenger of INI, XVI, 3, Skopje, 1972, 195 - 198.)

The French dominated trade by all means. The situation had not changed when the Gemidzhii decided to attack the foreign investors. It was by no accident that they chose Solun and a French steamer.

## **ECONOMIC REVIEW OF VELES**

The main reasons for the spread of revolutionary ideas among the Macedonian people as a whole and especially among the Macedonian youth, were due to the economic, social and political crisis that surfaced in the European part of the Ottoman Empire in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whose manifestations were the greatest in Macedonia. That crisis was born as a result of greed, social contradiction and oppression of the diverse people. It had national and religious overtones. The Macedonian people quickly realized that they were exclusive targets of social injustices and economic exploitation. The holders of political slavery and those who economically oppressed them were the same. They discovered that social injustices, economic exploitation and corruption of the state apparatus were tied with the political and national oppression. They witnessed the collapse of handicrafts and trade, serfdom, looting of their villages... In other words every kind of misfortune possible... And all this was due to the fact that Macedonia, their country, was under Ottoman rule.

How did the crisis appear? How and why did the guilds and trade collapse? Obvious examples of this can easily be found in the Macedonian city Veles.

Veles in the first half and middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> was one of the largest and most developed cities in Macedonia. In 1860 about 20,000 people lived in Veles, of whom about one third were Muslims. (Dancho Zografski, Condition and purpose of the Veles trade school in the 1857 school year, education and culture in Macedonia at the time of rebirth, MANU, Skopje, 1979, 44.) The economic prosperity of the city was influenced by the development of three main

economic sectors: preparing yellow sahtians (leather), trade and viticulture (grape growing).

The people of Veles made high quality yellow sahtians. Almost one quarter of the population dealt with this craft. Initially stock was bought in from various parts of Macedonia, and later goats began to appear in Veles. (Vasil K'rchov, visited Veles after the city experienced its economic boom, during which time over 400,000 skins were processed (Veles today and yesterday - Selected works. P, Sofia 1970, 196). Another author (H. Chochkov, City Veles, Sofia 1929, 48) put the number to 100 to 150,000 skins.) This trade greatly contributed to the development of animal husbandry and to the meat production industry enhancing the city's overall trade capacity. Meat in Veles was so inexpensive it could even feed the poorest. But according to K'rchov there were no poor people living in Veles. (V. K'rchov. C. D., 197.)

The yellow sahtian produced in Veles and the white sahtian made in Giakovitsa, Prizren and Pech was bought out by the Veles traders and sold in Vienna and Budapest. But Austria, protecting its own industry from Ottoman imported goods, began to impose import taxes. A 30% import levy was placed on all sahtian imports. On top of that, the Ottoman government not appearing overly concerned about its own economy, and seeing that its citizens were making good money from selling sahtian, decided to tax the skin production with a 12% levy of its own. The Ottomans also imposed a 6% transit levy on Serbian goods so that the general merchants from Veles and Macedonia had to pay 48% tax on their skins sold in the Austrian markets. This in fact led to the collapse of the leather industry in Veles as well as in other towns in Macedonia where sahtian was made. Most traders soon went bankrupt and leather craftsmen lost their jobs. Hundreds of families in Veles were left without bread. This drop in the market had a devastating effect on the other industries that supplied the raw materials for making sahtian, including on livestock and meat production.

Food production in Macedonia, particularly in Veles, developed separately during the Crimean War (1853-1856) when demand for food increased significantly in Europe. At that time Veles became the centre from where goods were transported along the Vardar

River to Solun and to a good part of northeastern Macedonia. However, competition from cheaper cereals imported from other countries pushed back agricultural production and trade with it. Commissioning the impatiently expected first railway in Macedonia in 1873 did not provide the desired results. Shipping agricultural products by rail was very expensive. On top of that, Veles lost its importance as a centre of distribution along the Vardar River. With the introduction of the railway more stations were opened up along the way and people from everywhere could transport their goods.

A highly developed viticulture, or grape production, was another developed aspect of the Veles economy. Veles at the time had around 1,200 vineyards and was capable of producing 420,000 oki of rakia. Revenues from rakia amounted to about one million grosha. This production and trade, however, was dealt a severe blow after the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), when most of the territories that bought rakia from Veles were levied with high taxes. This was due to decisions made at the Berlin Congress when parts of the Ottoman Empire were torn away. On top of that many European countries began to import other kinds of spirits, competing with rakia. The loss of these markets literally destroyed the viticulture in Veles, which was a serious economic factor in the life of that city.

In time more taxes were added to goods produced in Veles against the growth of corruption and wars... to mention a few factors. This gives you an idea of the general situation in which Veles found itself at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the economic collapse in Veles, its main preoccupation became agriculture and remained that way. There was hardly any trade in crafts and the small revenue coming from them could hardly meet the people's most basic needs. K'nchov wrote: "The situation in Veles is dire. The city looks like a deserted village. You only see a person here and there. Those who profited from the trade became rich and those close to them, a whole mass of population, who helped them profit with their pain and labour are now hungry and can hardly appease themselves with rye bread." (V. K'nchov. c. d., 199.) Veles, however, was not alone in this; there were similar situations all over Macedonia during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **FORMING AND SHAPING THE GEMIDZHII CIRCLE**

In the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, exactly at the time when an economic and social setback was taking place in Macedonia, a new generation of Macedonians was born and raised ready to carry out their historically defined mission: open a new revolutionary page in the development of the Macedonian people. Also born and raised in Veles at this time, were the young people who would form the Gemidzhii circle and in 1903 carry out the so-called Solun assassinations. The revolutionary determination in these youths, there is no doubt, was very much influenced by the economic and social conditions in which they found themselves in Veles and in Macedonia at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) was created in the year 1893-1894 and was tasked with struggling for Macedonia's liberation from the Ottoman government. After its formation the MRO gradually spread around Macedonian towns and villages, and helped the people recover from almost all economic exploitation and political oppression. Some of the future Gemidzhii began their revolutionary activities in the MRO.

The future Solun assassins followed MRO's development in their own surroundings. The Organization left a strong impression on them especially after the Vinitsa attack in November 1897, which in fact was the first time the MRO was discovered by the Ottoman Empire and by Europe. As the story goes, an armed band arrived from Bulgaria and, with the help of its accomplices inside Vinitsa, killed Kiazimaga, a rich Turk, and took 800 gold lira from his house. After their investigation of this murder, the authorities discovered a cache of weapons and uncovered the local MRO organization. After that, through means known from inquisition times, the authorities also uncovered the MRO's plots in Shtip, Kratovo, Palanets, Radovish, Kumanovo and Maleshevo. Furious from these discoveries the authorities terrorized the Macedonian population in this part of Macedonia for almost two months, committing horrific atrocities against them. About 220 people were brutally tortured, of whom a dozen died from the beatings, about 500 were jailed and about 300 fled to Bulgaria. This kind of terror was unprecedented in Macedonia and resonated throughout the entire country and among

the diplomatic circles in Europe. The people became increasingly angry and disgusted with the Ottoman government. Writing about the Vinitsa fiasco and the damage it caused, one of the future Gemidzhii said: “This act brought the Revolutionary Organization into existence and exposed the monstrous Ottoman despotic rule. With its mass arrests and severe tortures, the Ottoman government has caused much indignation among all of us. The Vinitsa act has shown us that there is something for us to fight against – and that is Ottoman domination.” (Todor Orgadzhiev “Za Solunskoto s’zaklitie” - 50 years since the Ilinden Uprising, Sofia 1953 116; Also see Pavel Shatev, Macedonia under slavery, Sofia 1968, 49-50.)

The founders and leaders of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization also had a lot of influence on the future Gemidzhii. Included among them were Damian Gruev, Pere Toshev, Petar Pop Arsov and Gorche Petrov.

The Gemidzhii circle was made up of a relatively small group of Macedonian youths. Included among the better known Gemidzhii were Iordan Popiordanov, Kosta Ivanov Kirkov, (Dime) Mechev-Mecheto, Ilia Trchkov, Vladimir (Vlado) Pingov, Georgi Petrov Bogdanov, Milan Arsov, Todor Organdzhiev, Todor Bogdanov, Ilia Popiordanov - all from Veles, as well as Pavel Shatev, Marko Boshnakov and Tsvetko Traikov.

The Gemidzhii were also influenced by some of the revolutionary literature floating around which helped them acquire and shape their circle. While attending school in the 1896/97 school year in the Exarchate Gymnasium in Solun, as well as at home in Veles, Iordan Popiordanov, Kosta Kirkov, Georgi Bogdanov, Todor Organdzhev and some of the others came into contact with socialist and other kinds of literature which piqued their interest. Among other things, when Vasil Glavinov came to Veles he brought with him the books “For brotherhood and socialism” by Vasa Pelarich, and “Is fate at fault” by Liuben Karavelov. While studying in Solun the future Gemidzhii read books by Pushkin, Shakespeare, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Victor Hugo, Balzac, Chernipevski, Pisarev, Hristo Botev, some of Plehanov’s translations, A. Hertsev, Bebel Kautsky and so on... Other books they were exposed to included “God and

Science” by L. Biuhner, “The woman and Socialism” by Bebel, “Siberia and the exiled in Russia”, “Underground Russia” and others by Chernishevski, “Speeches and proclamations” by Hugo and others, which some students read with more attention than the books about ordinary objects (T. Organdzhiev, c. d. 16; Pavel Shatev, C. D., 42 - 43).

The future Gemidzhii accepted the idea of becoming revolutionaries and the idea of liberating Macedonia but would not accept the idea that this had to be a mass armed struggle that would involve the entire Macedonian population. They preferred individual revolutionary actions, which they thought would produce greater results much faster with fewer casualties. The following circumstances led the future Gemidzhii from Veles to go in that direction:

Iordan Shurkov, originally from Veles who lived in Plovdiv where he accepted socialist views, came to Solun in 1879 to make contact with the students from Veles and teach them Marx and Engels’s concepts. As a result of this they acquired notions of scientific socialism and class struggle.

T. Organdzhiev wrote: “... we gradually accepted the idea of starting a revolutionary struggle but we did not know which way to go. Then the books “Battlefield of Nihilism” and “Underground Russia” fell into our hands and influenced us to have a negative attitude towards everything that was old. We were completely under the influence of those ideas and we negated everything. We decided to carry out something against the tyrants of our nation and burn for it. Our slogan was ‘Kie se archime’ (We will die in the name of freedom for the people)”. (T. Organdzhiev, 116-117.) This is how they also accepted to live their daily lives and to participate in their education. They finished their courses but skipped their graduation because they felt they needed to self-sacrifice themselves for Macedonia’s freedom. Otherwise they were all good students, but the idea of “self-sacrifice” had taken over their thoughts and shifted them to the realm of the revolutionaries; but to what kind of revolutionaries?

Several students from the Plovdiv Gymnasium in 1896 formed a secret group to fight for Macedonia’s liberation through

revolutionary means. The organizers and leaders of the group were Mihail Gerdzhikov and Petar Mandzhukov. Petar was the grandson of Natanail, former Bishop of Ohrid. They were all strongly influenced by events in Russia, nihilism, as well as by individual acts and heroes from the French anti-bourgeois Revolution. Figuring that lack of money was going to be their major obstacle to the realization of their liberation plans, Gerdzhikov and Mandzhukov decided to do something in order to raise the necessary money. They stole a decoration from Bishop Natanail and a ring from Gerdzhikov's mother and gave them to their friend Jordan Boshkov, an immigrant from Veles, to sell. The "theft", unfortunately, was discovered and their actions taken on behalf of the Macedonian liberation failed. Both students were expelled from the Gymnasium and the group broke up.

In 1897 several students from the Gymnasium were sent on a trip to visit Geneva. Included among them were Petar Mandzhukov and Mihail Gerdzhikov. There they found an abundance of revolutionary literature and made contact with the Russian revolutionaries, which shaped their outlook but also divided them. One group fell under the influence of Plehanov and became social democrats and the other fell under the influence of the far left. But, in spite of their influences, they remained part of the Macedonian Secret Revolutionary Committee (MSRC), its constitution and program which they created.

Through an appeal the MSRC condemned slavery and demanded from the freedom-loving people, and particularly from the youth, to stand up and fight against injustice. In part the appeal read: "...What could justify that ugly fact - the bondage of the Macedonian people? Macedonia has been an unhappy place for centuries without any kind of justice where kindness cannot even be imagined..." (Appeal by the Macedonian Secret Revolutionary Committee - INI f. k. 357.)

The MSRC's main objectives, as stated in their program attached to the appeal (Appeal by the Macedonian Secret Revolutionary Committee - INI f. k. 357) were: "To break the tyrannical government, to remove the shackles from the legs of the enslaved, to free the tormented Macedonian people from centuries of oppression... This is why the MSRC is organizing and this is what

the people in the Macedonian Secret Revolutionary Committee are fighting for.”

Demands made in the Program:

1. Full independence and wide freedom for the Macedonian people to create the kind of government they want;
2. The Committee will not favour any particular nationality, but will try to organize all of them into a whole for the struggle against Ottoman rule in Macedonia;
3. The Committee will not tolerate foreign interference in settling Macedonia’s future or the Macedonian Question...
4. The Committee considers the Ottoman authorities and all those interfering in its affairs, that directly and indirectly harm the Macedonian people and their liberation, as its enemy;
5. The peaceful Ottoman population is not the enemy, but on the contrary...

To achieve its goals, the Committee will employ a single remedy: Revolution!

At the end of the Program the Committee saw to it to inform the chauvinists in Macedonia, be they Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian or any other type that “the Committee workers are obliged to fight against them, and that all bearers of chauvinistic activities will be persecuted to the same degree as the worst enemy.” This was also highlighted in Article 81 of the MSRC Constitution.

The MSRC Constitution contained 100 Articles detailing and regulating the duties and rights of its members. Each Article called for members to be prepared when the anticipated moment arrives. Its main message was to “grab your arms and fight and die, if necessary, for Macedonia’s freedom...” (For more information on the MSRC Constitution and its printed editions, see: Dancho Zografski, “Macedonian Secret Revolutionary Committee and ‘Revenge’,” Skopje, 1954.)



The MSRC conclusively had a negative opinion about the role of the Macedonian immigrants in the Macedonian revolutionary movement. The Committee claimed that: “The Macedonian movement cannot be of benefit from afar from the immigrants that fill Bulgaria. They may be good for guerrilla fighting but for the revolution, as it is now, they are just an obstacle. The Macedonian slave should not be placing much hope on them; he must rely on his own two arms...”

Unfortunately, the negative comments made by the MSRC about the role of the Macedonian immigrants in Bulgaria, became a “weapon in the hands of the Bulgarian charlatans... a weapon which allowed them to climb up and down the ladder of power and manipulate their chauvinistic servants”. This was true for Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Romania. Under such circumstances, awakening the immigrant people’s consciousness was not possible... “They screamed to God for freedom but were not ashamed of profiting and filling their wallets with money from the rebellions as was the case in 1895. Activities conducted outside of the people were just that, activities... a waste of time. The Macedonian immigrants dealt with exactly such things...” (Ibid, 11, 59-60, 68.) When the Committee was talking about the immigrants it was talking about the immigrant leaders who overwhelmingly acted exactly the way they were characterized.

The question was “who was responsible for breathing liberation awareness into the enslaved population?” The schools could not assist in this regard because the schools were nothing more than “propagators of chauvinism, of enslavement and of subordination, where the younger generation was poisoned and split into rabid chauvinist-hostile camps... where respect was sowed into the breeding ground of depravation, without character and delusion – in other words to the Exarchates and to the Patriarchates and to the historical and philological ‘rights’ of the Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbians and Romanians; where they preached love for governments that suffocate us and for filial devotion to the Sultan, ‘our father-king’ ...”. (Ibid, 67 (“Revenge”).)

The Churches played the same role as the schools and they were of no help to the liberation efforts of the Macedonian people. (Ibid, 69 (“Revenge”).)

The MSRC looked at the situation in Macedonia carefully and decided that the Macedonian people should not rely on anyone but themselves in their liberation struggles, and least of all rely on the neighbouring countries. “History of the Macedonian struggles has revealed that every Bulgarian ruler would have been glad to take a bite out of Macedonia and drink its blood; that Macedonia for them (Bulgarian rulers) is nothing more than a means to rule...” (Ibid, 60-61 (v. “Voice”).)

The question was “should the Macedonian people place hope on European diplomacy, outside of Russia, for help?” Here too the answer was “no”. The Macedonian people could not expect help from Europe. Europe was not under Ottoman slavery, the Macedonian people were. They also felt that the Macedonian people could not rely on gaining their freedom with Russian help either because the Russian Tsar and freedom were mutually exclusive. Adulterated Christian motives forced Russia (Tsar separated from people, where the Russian people suffered the same as the Macedonian) to free Bulgaria and to support the liberation of Romania, Serbia and Greece, for purely personal interests, “Russia will ask for our liberty not for us, but to make it easier for itself to reach Constantinople... European diplomacy would do the same... help us if it was in their personal interest or if we were part of some grand scheme. But, it would appear, that there are no benefits to liberating Macedonia...” (Ibid, 65-66 (“Revenge”).)

“Let it be known to all that Macedonia’s liberation will be possible only when the entire population comes together, stands up, opens its eyes, rolls up its sleeves and cleans out its country of the large and small tyrants and the slave masters. Macedonia will be liberated when the Macedonian people push the Sultan’s decaying carcass out of Macedonia. (Ibid, 59-60 (“Revenge”).)

Even though the MSRC made its position very clear on the role of Europe and on the masses being involved in liberation struggles,

there was nothing to prevent the MSRC and the Gemidzhii from expecting Macedonia to be freed through European intervention.

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Based on what was said in the MSRC Constitution and Program we could not say that the MSRC took the position of “classical” anarchism. The MSRC, among other things, was directing the revolution of the oppressed masses as a means of liberating Macedonia. The MSRC felt strongly that socialism would have a greater impact than anarchism. The differences manifest between members of the group in Geneva came to full expression when they returned home. Back in Geneva a group of “Macedonian revolutionaries and terrorists” sprang up and published a newspaper called “Otm’shtenie” with the motto “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”, which advocated terror as a means of a liberation struggle. (To overcome all obstacles in our propaganda and to propagate the work – this is the task of terror that we will sow - the aim of our effort is revolution. Our ideal is to develop humanity and universal happiness. This was the means by which the goals and objectives in the v. “Revenge” were determined. We believe there is no need to point out inconsistencies in the MSRC materials and c. “Revenge”. It is not necessary for our purpose.) It appears that this group was composed of members or part of the members that made up the MSRC, among whom included were Slave Merdzhanov, Petar Mandzhukov and some of their friends from Geneva who chose to act individually in the Ottoman Empire. There they “grasped the idea of starting the liberation through pure terrorism primarily against the European capital invested in the Ottoman state.” (P. Shatev, 73.)

Mandzhukov and Merdzhanov returned home in 1899 in order to realize their intended plans. Mandzhukov went to Skopje where, after some time, he was arrested by the authorities and thrown in prison. Merdzhanov went to Solun where he met Iordan Shurkov, whom he knew from Plovdiv and through him he met the Veles group. The Veles group, as it turned out, was ripe for becoming involved in the revolution. They were ready to engage themselves in the struggle but didn’t know how. They were more or less predisposed to an individual type of struggle. But after hearing them

out, they accepted Mandzhukov and Merdzhanov's ideas. Mandzhukov by then was released from prison and had also gone to Solun. Mandzhukov and Merdzhanov preached to the Veles group that it was their duty not to "sleep" but to work and that it was an absolute must that they do something "grand". They suggested killing the sultan, the grand vizier, the valia in Solun, or some other nobles. They advised the Veles group to also think in those terms. Having just come back from abroad and having made connections with the Russian anarchists and nihilists, Mandzhukov and Merdzhanov's ideas and plans sounded very impressive to the young individuals from Veles. (T. Organdzhiev, 117.)

Another event that influenced the Veles group that it was going in the right direction was the Boxer Uprising in China. This was an uprising against the plundering and exploitation of foreigners perpetrated against the Chinese population. It was an uprising against the European countries which oppressed the Chinese people and committed atrocities against them. (It was an uprising against the foreign colonizers in China. The uprising known as the "Boxer Uprising" took place in 1900 and was incited and led by the secret society known as the "Fist in the name of justice and harmony". The bloody uprising was violently crushed in 1901.

"We began to understand." wrote T. Organdzhiev, "that Europe was to blame for our enslavement, which supported the rotting Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was maintained not because it could survive on its own but because the European powers supported it. The Ottoman Empire was surviving because of the injections it was receiving from them... This was why, if we wanted to fight against Ottoman domination, against the Sultan's tyranny, we needed to strike against those who supported that tyranny, namely the European powers... Then the idea to attack them and their enterprises was born in us... to attack the European capital..." (T. Organdzhiev, 117.)

And gradually this is how the Veles circle of students in Solun began to form its ideals and started calling itself and its members "Gemidzhii". Other revolutionary circles also emerged from the Gymnasium but they became associated with the Macedonian

Revolutionary Organization where they served. The Veles circle did not go in that direction.

The Gemidzhii believed that Macedonia could be liberated through acts of terror by attacking the European enterprises where a lot of Western capital was invested, such as in banks, railways and so on. They preferred self-sacrifice, especially by the Macedonian intelligentsia, over conventional methods of struggling and did not believe the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization had the ability to prepare a general uprising. According to their understanding, carrying out a general uprising in Macedonia was wrong because it was nearly impossible to organize and arm such a large number of dissatisfied people. Even if the masses were organized and a mass uprising was raised, according to them, it would only crush the tortured people and would not free them. The Gemidzhii did not believe freedom in Macedonia could be achieved through a National Revolution. They learned this and acquired their idealistic physiognomy from the revolutionary, anarchist and nihilistic literature they read and from their contacts with the anarchists in Switzerland. However, in their theoretical approach they neither could nor wanted to identify with their teachers. The Gemidzhii did not try to penetrate the essence of anarchism as a philosophical concept; they were mostly interested and were attracted by the practical side of its teaching. The Veles circle, filled with an incredible amount of hatred for injustice, was preoccupied with the question of how “quick and easy” Macedonia could be freed. This liberation, according to documents obtained from the Geneva group, depended on the great powers intervening in Macedonia. This means that the main objective of the Gemidzhii was to cause the great powers to intervene in favour of Macedonia’s liberation.

The Gemidzhii were not anarchists like those in Russia and the West. Their goal was the same as that of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. But while the MRO thought that Macedonia could be liberated through good planning and preparing the oppressed and exploited masses for a general uprising, until then the Gemidzhii wanted nothing to do with the masses and with a mass struggle and opposed individual revolutionary actions.

How this revolutionary group viewed the Macedonian revolution and the role of the great powers in it can be examined from a letter dated June 18, 1898, sent from Geneva by Petar Mandzhukov to K. Kirkov in Veles:

“Our unfortunate Macedonian nation has been put through much humiliation by the Turks. It is not a wonder when their degree of culture is well known. But of far greater concern is Europe’s behaviour, which on account of its dubious interests has forgotten its debt to a small nation in the heart of the world. It seems to me that our duty at this point in time is to turn our fight against Europe, which decided the fate of our people. Fighting against the Turks is pointless. I think that we need to turn our attention to hurt Europe’s pocket to remind it of the reality that enslaved people too have the right to life and liberty.

Our slavery might not have been so difficult if this propaganda ‘on behalf of our brothers’ and ‘well-wishers’ did not intend to divide brother from brother and cause the Turks to commit greater crimes against us. Unfortunately, our so-called ‘brothers’ will do everything in their power to impede the unity of our freedom-loving forces...

We know, dear Kosta that the population in our country (Macedonia) is different from the population in Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia which are homogenous countries... Therefore we must take this fact into account and reconcile our struggle in the interests with all these nationalities. We can achieve this only when all nations understand that freedom is not in the name of the country, but in who holds power in it. Then even our Muslims will understand that they are not free in the Turkish state, just like the Macedonians are not free...

I think that the Macedonian people in their current situation cannot be freed through an uprising. They will be facing not only the Ottoman Empire but also Europe, not to mention the Balkan States. I, like our friends in the MSRC are not against an uprising the way the Internal (IMRO) people see it. We are all for such an uprising when we are confident that it will succeed, and not to only expose our entire nation to a slaughterhouse. We want to sacrifice our own lives over sacrificing those of our people for creating the right

conditions for a broad uprising and the liberation of our people. We want to provoke occasional clashes with the Ottomans and through our blood gain the attention and sympathy of the freedom-loving people of Europe and win them over to help us with the uprising. And if not to help us, then at least not be against us...

This way the Macedonian Question could be dealt with quickly and in our interest. This could only happen if we become the leading Macedonians and constantly provoke riots. After all, our salvation is in the revolution. So, I leave it to you to familiarize our comrades with the attitude of our MSRC and spread around its ideas..." (Two letters from members of the Macedonian Secret Revolutionary Committee – "Razgledi", X, 7, Skopje, 1968, 849.)

## **IMAGES OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES**

The Veles Gemidzhii, those who had fallen by the bullets of the Ottoman soldiers in the streets of Solun, were quite young and neither could nor wanted to leave any sort of information about their short life or about their involvement in the revolutionary struggle. All that we know today about their character and revolutionary activities is what was left for us by the surviving Gemidzhii Pavel Shatev and Todor Organdziev, especially the first one. Attempts were made in Bulgaria during the Second World War to solicit information through canvassing descendants of some of the Gemidzhii but the results were quite meager. (Kosta Ts'rnushanov, *The Solun Assassins prior to 1903*. Military-historical collection, 3/1983, 159 and on.)

### **Iordan Popiordanov-Ortse (1881-1903)**

The first among the Gemidzhii was Iordan Popiordanov nicknamed Ortse. The Popiordanov family, originally from the village Papradishte, Veles Region, moved to the city Veles a long time ago. Ortse's father Giosho and his uncle Petar were traders (businessmen). Ortse grew up in a large family. He had 4 sisters and a brother named Mile, whose heroic death in the ranks of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was memorialized in one of the most beautiful Macedonian folk songs.

Ortse completed his elementary education in Veles and his secondary education in a gymnasium in Solun. As a student he was diligent and modest. He was tall, with a thin, dark olive face and regular features. At first glance he seemed like a humble and timid young man. But, as his friend Pavel Shatev wrote: “He was a nervous and restless young man from an early age. He could not stay in one place for more than five to ten minutes if he was not doing something. He was a very private individual and generally did not want to reveal anything about himself.” He was in touch with only a few of his relatives and friends from Veles and that constituted the circle with which he maintained a close relationship. (Pavel Shatev, 421.)

Ortse loved mathematics and history. All other school subjects he considered unnecessary and unimportant. Even as a student he exhibited the traits of a “person in charge”. This trait appeared publicly for the first time when he was in class VI at the gymnasium. One day, for unknown reasons, a professor did not come to work. According to school policy he should have been replaced by another professor. However, on Ortse’s initiative, the Veles circle decided not to allow that to happen. The entire class revolted forcing the school authorities to act. Harsh disciplinary measures were taken resulting in the suspension of all the students from class VI. In other words, a meaningless event served as an occasion through which a rebellion took place, expressing student dissatisfaction with “the school system and with the general order in the Solun academic and educational institution”. (Ibid, 422.)

Ortse was not happy with the school administration’s approach to solving the student problem and with the tactics it used to break the students. As a result he demonstratively left the gymnasium. He was not only disappointed in the school administration he was also disappointed in his treasonous classmates who so easily succumbed to pressure. Ortse left the school towards the end of the school year and became involved in the “whirlpool of the Macedonian liberation movement”. (Ibid.)

“Ortse as a revolutionary was a solid and determined person. He was able to impose his views and opinions into many of the various disputes that took place regarding the liberation struggle. He often



used clear and convincing words to illustrate his arguments. His knowledge of history, especially the history of the French Revolution, very much helped him in this regard. He rarely spoke but when he did his opponents became his supporters. He was extremely convincing and able to have much impact on those around him... Ortse was born as a leader with a commanding and elastic spirit. He was extremely strict with his friends even about the slightest errors made intentionally or accidentally. Other than that he loved all those closest to him, his friends and his people. On the other hand, he hated all those chest beaters who thought of themselves as the authority over the people. He hated glory because he fought sincerely and wanted to serve his own enslaved people..." (Ibid, 424.)

One of the most characteristic features of Iordan Popiordanov was that could not tolerate slavery. Without thinking he was prepared to give his own young life if only slavery in Macedonia could be abolished.

### **Kosta Ivanov Kirkov (1882-1903)**

Kosta Kirkov was the second most important and prestigious person in the Gemidzhii circle. He belonged to a wealthy family. His father Ivan was a small-time trader and an honest and diligent resident of Veles. Kosta was the oldest of five children. Kosta was a nice looking young man of medium height, round face, fine facial features, dark eyes and dark hair. But his personality was opposite from what he projected from his looks. According to Pavel Shatev: "Hiding behind Kosta's physical appearance and feminine looks was a courageous man, a man who had many frightening and destructive ideas and prospects, a man who was ready to thrust himself and fight against anything with the greatest of enthusiasm. He was ready to fight against prejudice, laws, social orders and all kinds of other injustices and he was prepared to do it alone if necessary. He was always happy with himself and polite and attentive to everyone else, especially to his friends. He was the most sympathetic and most liked person in the Gemidzhii circle. This was mainly due to his great idealism, modesty and kindness..." He was usually silent and rarely said a word during discussions but when he spoke he made sense. His suggestions and deductions were logical and striking. He

rarely showed hopelessness, despair or great joy. He was always calm, collected and cheerful, appearing cold-blooded with good-natured pleasantries and sarcastic humour. He was an example for the others and was often imitated. (Ibid, 225-420.)

As a young man Kosta was well-informed. He was familiar with most basic social and revolutionary movements as well as with the history of the French Revolution. He was very sympathetic to the suffering of his people and was ready to share everything he had with those who suffered. His mother used to send him to Solun with full suitcases and he always returned with nothing saying that he had given his belongings to his poor peers. (K. Tsrnushanov, c. Statia, 161.)

According to Kosta, the only person that can call himself a revolutionary is a person who is capable of giving up all his worldly goods and accepting the revolution as a profession. His motto was: “Deeds speak louder than words.” (Stefan Avramov, Heroic times, I, Sofia, 35.) Kosta was influential and courageous, he “looked at death like an achievement in life and was never afraid of it regardless of how it would spring up as long as it served his purpose in the struggle for Macedonia”. (P. Shatev, 245-246.) (Kirkov like Ortse did not want his picture taken under any circumstances. He even turned down requests from family members to send photos home. He wanted no traces of him to remain after his death. He felt that as an individual he fought and would die for his ideas and no one should distract themselves with that, not his family and not anyone else.)

### **Dimitar Mechev (1870-1903)**

Another large figure in the Gemidzhii circle was Dimitar (Dime) Mechev, or “Meche” (young bear), as he was usually called. Meche was the oldest among the Veles Gemidzhii. According to Pavel Shatev’s description, Meche was a tall thin man with a thin face, small eyes, sharp straight nose, curly black hair, always modestly dressed, and looked like an ordinary worker.

Meche was a poor child. He completed primary school with great difficulties. He lost his father and had to take care of himself and his

mother since he was very young. He joined the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and became an activist as soon as the MRO arrived in Veles. Failing to fulfill an RMO order (kill a Veles businessman), Meche was compromised and identified by the authorities. Ever since then he was forced to live in hiding as a rebel in the surrounding Macedonian mountains where he spent more than a year, after which he immigrated to Bulgaria. Not wanting to be a burden on the MRO, or to engage in the whirlpool of the immigrant organization, he took on a job as a common labourer in the Pernik mine.

Meche was fearless, resourceful, efficient and effective in the MRO. These were qualities that were noticed by Gotse Delchev (outside of the Veles organization) who personally engaged Meche in doing several tasks for the Organization. Evidence of this can be found in the letters that Delchev wrote. (On June 12, 1900 Delchev gave Meche a letter and sent him to see Nikola Malishevski, a famous MRO worker in Bulgaria. Meche's objective was to join a group tasked with kidnapping the child of Ivan Geshev, a Bulgarian statesman. Meche's involvement in the MRO was again mentioned by Delchev in a letter dated December 8, 1900 and in another letter in the autumn of 1902 - Gotse Delchev, Correspondence. Redaksia Hristo Andonov-Polianski, Skopje, 1972, Doc. 93, 96, 225; P. Shatev, 429.)

By nature Meche was a quiet, honest and fair individual with a strong compassion for the suffering of his people. At the same time he viewed the intelligentsia with suspicion believing it was responsible for society's ills. He lived an austere life. The only meaningful thing in his life was his struggle for Macedonia's liberation. He was ready to give his life for what he believed in without hesitation and at a moment's notice.

Being familiar with the workings of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and with the level of preparedness required to arm and involve the entire Macedonian population en masse, Meche came to the conclusion that Macedonia's liberation could not be achieved through a general uprising. Meche was prepared to sacrifice himself for Macedonia's liberation but did not have faith in the oppressed masses to carry out actions similar to those of the Gemidzhii. When

Ortse returned from Geneva in early 1902, he decided to recruit Meche into his circle. Then, after some persuasive discussions, Meche agreed to join the Gemidzhii. His addition enriched the circle with an older, fearless and experienced member who had many ties to the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and personal contact with Gotse Delchev and Damian Gruev. At first Meche remained in Sofia as a representative of the Gemidzhii, but not long after that he came back home to be personally and directly engaged in the realization of the general plan.

### **Ilia Trchkov (1884-1903)**

Ilia Trchkov was one of the youngest among the Gemidzhii. He was only 19 years old when he died in 1903. Physically he was a big, young man but he was also modest and quiet. Ilia was happy to carry out all tasks put in front of him without hesitation. According to Shatev: “He believed in what he was doing and did his part with great devotion... the revolutionary tasks... He was a good example of an intimate and dear comrade who, at any given moment, was ready to sacrifice himself for his friends and relatives”. (P. Shatev, 431)

Ilia was not able to finish his secondary education. He went to work as a shoemaker and used his job as cover for his revolutionary activities both in Veles and Solun.

### **Vladimir Pingov (1883-1903)**

Vladimir (Vlado) belonged to a family of craftsmen. His brothers were barbers and through them he too became familiar with the craft. Vlado was a short man with a dark, olive complexion and was cheerful in nature. He did his assigned tasks quietly and diligently. He was well-disciplined and was always ready to engage himself even in the most serious of actions. During the three-year period of preparation in Solun, Vlado was given very risky assignments. But, despite that, he was always cheerful and showed no anxiety or nervousness. According to Shatev, Vlado was a great fatalist. “Whatever dangerous work he was given to do he felt it was predestinated by fate and he had no objection to doing it and did it with great satisfaction, believing that he was carrying out a moral deed for his nation. (Ibid, 434-435.) He began his pre-gymnasium

education in Veles and continued his gymnasium education in Solun. He was convinced that he would die for the “cause” and did not finish his education.

### **Georgi Bogdanov (1879-1939)**

Georgi P. Bogdanov was the son of one of the most powerful and well-known families in Veles. He had a great childhood without a care in the world. He finished his primary education in Veles and in 1897 he enrolled in the Solun gymnasium. Before finishing his education Georgi took on a job as a merchant working for his brother-in-law Ilia Popstefanov, a commissioner in Solun. At first Georgi avoided the revolutionary turmoil and joined the Gemidzhii circle much later, in 1901. He was drawn in by his comrades Ortse, Kosta and the other Veles Gemidzhii. Being employed in Solun, Georgi was a great asset to the Gemidzhii circle.

And, like the other Gemidzhii, Georgi Bogdanov was a modest, quiet but persistent individual in doing his tasks. (P. Shatev, Georgi P. Bogdanov - Il. Ilinden 107, Sofia 1939, 13.)

### **Milan Arsov (1886-1908)**

Milan Arsov was the youngest in the Gemidzhii circle. He was born in the village Oraovets, Veles Region. He completed his primary education in Veles, he then studied in the Bitola gymnasium for a year and after that he enrolled in the Solun gymnasium. He had already teamed up with the Gemidzhii when he was in Veles.

According to Shatev, who wrote about him with great sympathy: “...Milan was a very trusted friend of the conspirators... He was a typical phenomenon of the epoch that gave birth to all the heroes in these turbulent times in Macedonia. Milan was very young... but his bravery rivaled his youth. His enthusiasm had no limits...” (P. Shatev, The Solun Assassins and the imprisoned in Fezan, Sofia 1927, 15-16.)

Milan was a tall young man with a thin pale face and black hair. He was daring and strong-willed.

In addition to the aforementioned Veles Gemidzhii directly or indirectly involved in the Solun assassinations, there were also others from Veles. Unfortunately very little information was left behind about them, not even enough to describe their character traits or physical appearance. But the fact that they belonged to the Gemidzhii circle is enough information to convince us that they could not have been much different from the other Gemidzhii, most importantly we know that they were willing to sacrifice themselves for Macedonia's freedom. These young men were Todor Organdzhiev, Todor Bogdanov, Ilia Popiordanov (Ortse's cousin) and Alexi Minov-Kanikot.

The other Gemidzhii and direct participants in the Solun assassinations were not from Veles. Their names were Pavel Shatev, Marko Boshnakov and Tsvetko Tpaikov.

### **Pavel Potsev Shatev, (1882-1951)**

Pavel Shatev was one of the most prominent members in the Gemidzhii circle. He was born in Kratovo to a powerful family. He completed his elementary education in Kratovo, his middle school in Skopje, and gymnasium (class IV-VII) in Solun in 1900. He joined the revolutionary movement in Kratovo when he was attending IV class in the Solun gymnasium. He was also a member of the revolutionary circle operating in the gymnasium. Shatev thereafter lost interest in the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. In his opinion the MRO was not properly managed. Its Central Committee was unable to successfully direct the revolution and its actions and the Organization had a number of other shortcomings. The morale in the ranks of the Organization was low and this low morale was imported from Bulgaria. "Local leaders and agitators who had the opportunity to go to Bulgaria and meet and exchange ideas with other members of the Organization from other parts of Macedonia as well as get acquainted with the immigrant organization that Macedonian immigrants had joined," writes Shatev, "came back demoralized. Even the more positive ones found a demoralizing atmosphere in free Bulgaria..." Shatev went even further to say: "Those who want to do clean work and remain clean should never set foot in Bulgaria and, if it can't be avoided, they should never

stay in Bulgaria for more than a week”. (P. Shatev, Macedonia under slavery..., 71-72.)

Shatev left the gymnasium revolutionary circle and joined the Gemidzhii in 1900. He devoted himself fanatically to his work and took part in all sorts of risky tasks, both in the preparatory period and during the assassinations themselves. Physically Shatev looked like an average person but he was daring, persistent, accomplished and loyal to his companion. In other words, he had more or less the same characteristic features as all the other Gemidzhii.

### **Marko Boshnakov (1874-1903)**

Marko Boshnakov was born in Ohrid. He completed his elementary and gymnasium education in Ohrid after which, in 1900, he joined a revolutionary unit. In the beginning he was under Boris Sarafov's command and participated in the execution of a Romanian journalist named Mihailianu in Bucharest who was charged with protecting perpetrators. This execution, ordered by Boris Sarafov, caused significant echoes in Europe, particularly in Bulgaria and Romania which brought those two countries to the brink of an armed conflict.

Marko Boshnakov joined the Gemidzhii circle in 1902. His characteristic features were modesty, humbleness, achievement...

### **Tsvetko Traikov (around 1860-1903)**

Tsvetko Traikov was the oldest of all the assassins. He became involved with the Gemidzhii much later, after Boris Sarafov sent him to Solun to kill the Solun vali. (P. Shatev, Solun Assassination ..., 46.) Traikov was originally from Resen but lived in Bulgaria. He was very sick for a long time.

We know that about twelve Gemidzhii were directly involved in the actual implementation of the assassinations. However, there were other people involved in assisting the Gemidzhii in this regard. It is well known that conspiratorial activities could not be successfully carried out without the assistance of other persons to serve as cover, observers, couriers, and so on. The revolutionary actions of the Gemidzhii, however, were not exactly conspiratorial activities and

did not need a wide circle of accomplices, not that such accomplices could be easily found. The people who helped the Gemidzhii knew nothing of about their secrets because these secrets were not divulged to anyone outside of the circle. Their helpers were actually sympathizers of the Macedonian revolutionary movement who believed they were helping the Gemidzhii in their efforts to liberate our people.

Shatev wrote that he needed a lot of space to explain the actions of all his accomplices (helpers) in the Solun dynamics but gave specifics of only a few. He did not even mention the names of the others.

Included among the most famous of Shatev's accomplices in the assassinations, not only in Solun but also in Tsari Grad (Istanbul), was Nancho Stoianov. Nancho was the son of a Resen merchant named Kalcho who lived in Tsari Grad. Kalcho owned a store near the Ottoman Bank in Tsari Grad which was rented by S. Merdzhanov, P. Sokolov, P. Mandzhukov and P. Shatev who used it to dig a tunnel that would supposedly have led them to the foundations of the Ottoman Bank which they were planning to dynamite. Unfortunately they were detained in 1900 and arrested on suspicion that they were conspiring to act against the Sultan's order. Detained among the four conspirators was also Nancho who they thought could not endure the torture. But despite their torment the four and especially Nancho pleaded not guilty to the charges and were released. Nancho did not give up the conspirators even though he was fully aware that the discovery of their plans would have meant death for him and destruction for his family. And indeed, when the tunnel in the store was discovered in 1901, Nancho and his father Kalcho were arrested, sentenced to life imprisonment and sent to prison where Kalcho was tortured to death. After serving his sentence Nancho was released, but was seriously ill. Soon afterwards he died. Their families were left without breadwinners and were exposed to hunger and suffering.

Milan Sazdov was one of those Macedonian youths who would risk his young life for the benefit of Macedonia's liberation. Milan was born in Veles but left the city when he was still a child, looking for a crust of bread. He was employed as a waiter and worked for the



Belgrade-Tsari Grad railway line. He was 18 years old when he was initiated into the Gemidzhii cause. His task was to acquire dynamite in Bulgaria and, in the highest of secrecy, deliver it to Tsari Grad, which he did impeccably. "During the winter Milan Sazdov," wrote Shatev, "fulfilled his conspiratorial task with enthusiasm and joy. He was very happy to be in our company and, with a glance, wanted to show us that: "If I can't serve my homeland with anything else, at least with what I can..."

Gotse Chanev was one of the most trusted faces in Solun outside of the Gemidzhii circle. Gotse was from Kukush but lived with his family in Solun. His little shop became one of the most secure places for the Gemidzhii to hang out. It was the same with his house. As a former member of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization in Kukush, Gotse knew many things and many people. He used his entire experience (he was forty years old) in the service of the Gemidzhii. He helped them with everything he could, most importantly, by allowing them to use his shop and home to exchange information even in the most critical times. Ortse and Kirkov, who had the most contact with him, loved him and were very grateful to him. Gotse Chanev survived the Solun Gemidzhii and was very much interested in their fate and that of their relatives.

Included among the people who helped the Gemidzhii was a woman. This particular woman deserves a special mention not only because she was a woman but also because she had nothing to do with Macedonia, except that she had a great compassion for the ongoing Macedonian struggle against the sultan's tyranny. Her name was Anna Shepets and she was Hungarian. Anna worked as a singer in the famous "Batemberg" hotel in Sofia where Gotse Delchev and a great number of Macedonian revolutionaries regularly stayed when they were in Sofia. Anna came in contact with them there and had the opportunity to become acquainted with the Macedonian people's suffering and struggle. As a result she became a great sympathizer of the Macedonian revolutionary movement. So, when it was proposed to her to go to Tsari Grad and serve with the Gemidzhii (who she only knew were revolutionaries, but probably knew nothing about their plans) she accepted the task with pleasure and without fear of any of the catastrophic consequences she may encounter. The Gemidzhii were wrong when they thought that Anne

would “charge” for her service. When they asked her what kind of reward she would accept for her cooperation, she boldly replied that she would not work for money because she knew that she would be engaged in a sacred service. She “loved the Macedonian people who were willing to die for the freedom of their homeland”, and she knew many of those young people who spent time at the “Battemberg” and later died for their Macedonian cause. (Ibid, 254-256.) The only thing that Anna wanted was to buy the pledged jewelry and luggage from a commissioner and extortionist. The total purchase cost six Napoleons (gold coins). She took the jewelry and left her luggage to the Gemidzhii in Tsari Grad. While in Tsari Grad she was employed as a cabaret singer in the variety show “Crystal”. Her task was to collect and store the dynamite that Milan Sazdov delivered.

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The Veles group was fully constituted as a circle with the name “Gemidzhii” in 1899. Why did the young people of Veles call their revolutionary circle “Gemidzhii” and what exactly did that mean? Even though the answers to these questions can be found in existing literature, the various sources do somewhat differ in their explanations. One of the stories of how the Gemidzhii got their name was that they wanted a symbolic way to show that their lives were at their end and that their “boat” (gemia) would sail into the turbulent sea and either take them to the coast (success) or break up on the rocks (failure). (Stefan Avramov, Solun Conception – II. Ilinden, Year V, book V, Sofia 1932, 4. Almost the same explanation was given by P. Shatev in Macedonia under slavery, 84.)

According to another claim, the Veles students often walked along the Solun seashore watching the Jewish fisherman and boatmen pull out their boats (gemii) from the sea to repair them. The young people thought that “a boat out of the water” or “a boat on dry land” was a good symbol describing the current socio-economic conditions in Macedonia. The path taken by ordinary people following their pursuit for existence was uncertain and this is why the boats had to be thrown back into the water, which meant “let the usual path be abandoned and all sacrifices be made for the good of

the enslaved people”. (S. Simeonov, Solunskoto s’zaklitie (1898-1903), Sofia, 1921, 5.) According to this story the word “Gemidzhii” was an allegorical expression of the specific revolutionary and life-path chosen by the young people in the circle.

Todor Organdzhiev, one of the circle’s members, gave us an even simpler answer. He said that even though they were good students, the young men from Veles decided to leave school and “roam around the sea” in their pursuit of sacrificing themselves for the liberation of their country. “This is how we gradually adopted the name boatmen (Gemidzhii)” wrote Organdzhiev. (Todor Organdzhiev, 117.)

The interpretation given by Organdzhiev, it seems, at least to us, is the best and most logical answer to how the Gemidzhii got their name and what it meant for them. Organdzhiev, by the way, was one of the two surviving Gemidzhii who wrote about their experiences.

# PART TWO

## THE GEMIDZHII AT WORK

### **GEMIDZHII - THE REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION - SUPREME MACEDONIAN COMMITTEE**

The Gemidzhii believed that they, as individualists and as revolutionaries who were ready to sacrifice themselves without having to engage the broad masses of the people, would be able to achieve everything they set out to do provided they had enough money. As a result they spent a lot of time looking for money. They constantly thought that money and then dynamite were the main obstacles in their way to fulfilling their revolutionary objectives. Of course, they never thought of coming into money in a legal way - through membership, work or the like. According to their plans, their first objective was to find money in a quick and easy way. For example, at first they thought of raising the money by stealing it from a wealthy Turk named Arshin-bey, living in Veles, but could not break into his house without being seen. They then made attempts to raise money from other sources but again without much success. (Ibid, 118.) After that they came up with the idea of obtaining the money through “ransom”.

Kosta Kirkov and Todor Bogdanov belonged to wealthy families so it was suggested that they be “kidnapped” for “ransom” and then have their parents pay for their release. And indeed one day they “disappeared” and hid in one of the houses they used in Solun. The others got in contact with their parents and suggested to them that if they wanted their sons to be returned to them alive and well they should pay the ransom. Kosta’s father pledged to pay 400, and Todor’s father pledged to pay 200 Turkish lira. The two parents did not go to the authorities and tried on their own to determine where their sons were hidden. Their first survey of Solun did not yield results. After that it occurred to them that the “abducted” may have been taken to the mountains. To find out more about this they would have to go to Sofia. (According to some sources, Kosta and Todor

were hiding in Solun, Dupnitsa and Rila.) While Todor's father refused to pay the ransom, Ivan, Kosta's father, went to Sofia to search for his son. In Sofia he found out that the boys were alive and well and that they would be released once the ransom was paid. After that Ivan made contact with Gotse Delchev and gave him a considerable amount of money (200 Turkish lira). However, the negotiations to pay the "ransom" were delayed for a longer time than expected and a lot of that money was used to pay for other expenses. In the end only 20-30 lira ended up in the Gemidzhii coffers. (T. Organdzhiev, 118; P. Shatev, Macedonia under slavery, 74, S. Simeonov, 6.)

Their first attempt, although partially successful, proved to the Gemidzhii that raising money would be a very complex, risky and difficult process. This forced them to look at their situation more carefully and their planning more realistic.

After receiving the "ransom", Kosta and Todor were "freed". But, realizing that they did not have enough money to start anything the Gemidzhii got together in Sofia to discuss future plans. According to Shatev: "Nothing could be started with the little bit of money left over from the ransom and they had no other means of supporting themselves. They discovered that it was not easy being conspirators and so they moved back with their relatives." (P. Shatev, 75.)

The "kidnapping" attempt by the Gemidzhii had another consequence: the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization discovered their existence as a revolutionary conspiratorial group planning to fight against Ottoman rule and immediately received its support directly from Gotse Delchev. But the Gemidzhii, as they had done right from the start, did not want anyone's help, especially help from the MRO. They did not want to have a relationship with the MRO because they believed they would not be able to easily accomplish their goals.

While Merdhanov's group remained in Bulgaria, the rest of the Gemidzhii returned to Veles and remained with their parents. Here they became connected with the local committee of the MRO, whose main representatives were Petre Boshnakov and Traiche Hristov. Even though they did not join the MRO it was understood

that they all worked together for a “common cause”. In January 1900, Traiche Hristov and Todor Organdzhiev went to Sofia and met with Gotse Delchev who then approved this cooperation. (T. Organdzhiev, 118.)

In order to expand their activities in other cities in Macedonia, the Gemidzhii used their relationship with Gotse Delchev and the MRO. They even asked if Gemidzhii could be appointed as teachers in Shtip and Strumitsa, but they were rejected.

Being together in their hometown in Veles, the Gemidzhii spent the winter 1899/1900 in a “winter sitting” reading books and reviewing them. Bazarov, Turgenev’s main character and hero, left quite a striking impression on them. They all wanted to imitate him: talk little and work hard!

The Gemidzhii were not completely idle in Veles. In 1899 they opposed the Exarchate bishop in Veles when he asked the Veles residents to donate money to pay for the Sv. Panteleimon bell tower. They also objected to collecting funds for the Sv. Stefan church in Tsari Grad. The Gemidzhii opposed both initiatives by gluing posters to the doors of churches and schools advising the people to spend the money allocated for the bell tower on renovating the ruined and old schools, and the money allocated for the church in Tsari Grad on educational purposes, “By doing this,” wrote Simeonov, “the Veles circle manifested itself as a entity working against the leaders of the Bulgarian cultural works. They also showed that they were against the administration in Tsari Grad and against its representative the bishop of Veles”. (S. Simeonov, 7.)

Kosta Kirkov forwarded the idea that a plan be made for the Gemidzhii to expand their operations in several cities in Macedonia. But the Gemidzhii, it appears, did not have the means to do that.

Attempts to self-fund such initiatives did not yield the desired results. Therefore, the Gemidzhii made a decision to use MRO resources. They established a close connection with Traiche Hristov.

Traiche Hristov was a prominent revolutionary in Veles, where he operated a grocery store. Wanting to educate himself, he went to

school as an adult and after completing his courses joined the revolutionary movement as an agitator and organizer. Later he was given a teaching job in Strumitsa, Pehchevo and Maleshevo, where he was also a regional leader in the MRO's network. The Gemidzhii felt that such persons could be of great benefit to their work and tried to win him over. They did the same with Boshnakov. On top of that the Gemidzhii believed that the most prominent people of Veles should be convinced to help the revolutionary movement. Unfortunately both Christov and Boshnov were more inclined towards the MRO and did not want to be associated with the Gemidzhii circle. When the Gemidzhii left for Solun, Hristov and Bosnakov went with them but quickly left and returned to Veles. After that they left for Sofia.

P. Shatev, who personally knew both men as well as many prominent people in Veles, wrote about them and gave an interesting assessment about their contribution to the liberation movement: "Traiche Hristov and Petre Bonakov were two complementary individuals, two typical representatives of the popular revolutionary masses and intelligentsia in the Skopje Region. They were educators of many famous as well as less known fighters and revolutionaries in Veles and in the surrounding region. Traiche Hristov, Petre Boshnakov and Milan Popiordanov were precursors to all the fighters and revolutionaries from the first revolutionary epoch in Veles and the surrounding region..." (Traiche Hristov served in the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization in Bulgaria and was a close collaborator of Gotse Delchev. Pavel Shatev met with Hristov, while doing some other task in Bulgaria, and then took him to a secret house where he met with Gotse Delchev and Iane Sandanski. When Shatev asked Hristov why he had brought them to this house, he said:

"To hide them. The money from Miss Stone has been received and the police know about it. The Supremacists are not sleeping and the government wants them apprehended at any cost. They don't want to give the Internal Organization the opportunity to step up and be more independent..." Shatev wrote about Hristov and Boshnakov's activities in Bulgaria with great sympathy. In Veles Hristov was the centre around which groups of emigrants, citizens, craftsmen, merchants, and especially villagers, circled. Boshnakov was a

central personality in Veles region, as well as in parts of the Skopje intelligentsia in the Skopje Revolutionary District. Traiche Christov was accidentally killed in 1902, and Petre Boshnakov died in 1908 in Skopje after a long illness. - P. Shatev, 222-224. P. Boshnakov is the author of the famous book entitled: Edin Makedonets, Bulgarian Propaganda in Macedonia and Odrin, Sofia 1902.)

The inability of the Gemidzhii to get close to the people of MRO caused them some disappointment but at the same time reinforced the idea of being independent just the way they were planning to be when they first started. It strengthened their old conviction that involving too many people was not a good idea!

As mentioned earlier, Delchev was on board with the Gemidzhii and promised them support at the meeting in Sofia he had with Organdzhiev and Hristov. However, the MRO at that point in time was not in a position to support the Gemidzhii materially. But what Delchev could not do for them immediately could be done for them by Boris Sarafov.

Gotse Delchev and Giorche Petrov, who were also the foreign representatives of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization in Bulgaria, made an effort to gain the cooperation of the Macedonian immigrant organization (Supreme Macedonian Committee) leadership in order to utilize the immigrant organization as a contributor to the revolutionary movement. As a result of that effort a joint platform for action was devised.

The Sixth Extraordinary Congress of the Macedonian immigrant organization in Bulgaria began on May 1, 1899 during which a list of names for the election of a new Supreme Committee was accepted. Boris Sarafov was elected chairman of the Committee. The new Supreme Committee with all its material forces put itself in the service of the Macedonian Revolutionary Movement. It immediately called for a fundraiser to be organized and for voluntary donations to be accepted. And with help from Delchev and Petrov, Sarafov's fundraising Committee did well yielding significant results. During the Seventh Congress, attended for the first time by Delchev and Petrov, 450,000 leva were raised, which was a large sum of money. That money was donated mostly by the



Macedonian immigrants in Bulgaria who wanted to help the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, and a good deal of that money was spent on exactly that.

However, the venerable Sarafov began to deal in “dirty politics”. He used his presidential position in the Committee and the full coffers belonging to the Committee for his own thrills and fantasy of making himself a “great” person and a “great” politician. Bulgaria’s borders for him became very tight. He used the large sums of money to found the “L’Effort” newspaper, which was edited by Simeon Radev and, among other things, played a major role in popularizing Sarafov’s name as “the leader” of the Macedonian movement.

Cooperation between MRO representatives and the Supreme Committee was sanctioned during the Supreme Committee’s Seventh Congress held in early August 1900. However, it did not take too long after this congress was held for the fundamental differences that existed between the Macedonian Revolutionary Movement and the Supreme Committee to emerge. After Sarafov’s Committee was formed it was impossible to starve these differences but only apparently to squeeze them to the side. In fact, as it turned out, even before Sarafov’s Committee was elected, officers headed by General Ivan Tsonchev were involved in the committee’s affairs and secretly plotted to take over the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Delchev and Petrov were unaware of this. When this was done, Tsonchev was planning to resign from the Bulgarian army, take over the presidency of the Supreme Committee and raise an uprising in Macedonia. Sarafov, however, breached all agreements and invested his entire energy in taking over the leadership of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Sarafov’s politics ruined his relationship with Delchev, Petrov and with the MRO, which later led to a complete breakdown and open confrontation between the MRO and the Supreme Committee.

Sarafov’s Committee and Sarafov himself created the impression that if the material assistance provided to the MRO from his end was to be cut off, especially during the beginning of the revolution, the struggle would not succeed. This stunt unfortunately caused a great deal of damage to the moral and political character of the MRO. Sarafov led the European governments, the world public and

the other two neighbouring countries (Greece and Serbia) into believing that everything that was done in Macedonia, all the preparations of the uprising, were done by Sarafov. Believing that Sarafov and Bulgaria itself were behind the impending rebellion in Macedonia, the MRO became a target in the hands of all those who had ill intentions. The MRO became a target and was punished for something it had not done. By giving the impression that the MRO was subordinated to the Supreme Committee and the Supreme Committee was subordinated to the Palace and to the Bulgarian government, Sarafov opened the doors to speculation that the revolution in Macedonia was prepared, led and controlled by Sofia and would begin with a sign given by Prince Ferdinand and his government.

By doing this Sarafov compromised himself and could no longer remain at the helm of the Supreme Committee. Because he did not want to leave the committee voluntarily, Tsonchev and his committee of officers decided to remove him during the next convention. Tsonchev's people, through demagoguery, deception and force managed to remove Sarafov during the Ninth Congress held in July 1901. (Krste Bitovski, *Macedonia and the Principality of Bulgaria (1893-1903)*, Skopje 1977, 126-166.) At that point Tsonchev, a loyal and confidential face of King Ferdinand, took over the Supreme Committee (with Stoian Mihailovski, the famous Bulgarian writer holding the presidency). Sarafov continued to deal with the "revolution" by working hard to present himself as a friend of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization.

Even though Boris Sarafov was removed from the Supreme Committee the Gemidzhii continued to maintain ties with him. Sarafov on the other hand continued to provide them with material aid. He helped Merdzhanov's group when he was head of the Supreme Committee and continued to help the Gemidzhii later.

The Gemidzhii almost exclusively concentrated their activities in Solun and, wanting to or not, were forced to maintain a relationship with the MRO Central Committee whose seat was also in Solun. In the beginning all Gemidzhii actions were limited to ideological and political preparations and there was no need for any sort of relationship to be imposed. However, when they decided to act on

their plans the situation changed. Even if the Gemidzhii did not like or did not need to have contacts with the Central Committee, the Central Committee itself could not be indifferent and not be interested in everything that was happening in the revolutionary field in the city and in the whole of Macedonia.

When the Central Committee, consisting of the old composition, was led by Dr. Hristo Tatarchev, the Gemidzhii dealt with him with much respect. He was the “authority” for them and there were no problems between the MRO Central Committee and the Gemidzhii circle. But when the Gemidzhii began to put their plans into action, without letting the MRO Central Committee know, problems began to appear between them. The situation changed in January 1901 when, after a major failure, the MRO Central Committee was shut down, taken over by Ivan Garvanov and replaced with a new Central Committee. Who was Garvanov and who were the new members of the Central Committee?

The appearance, growth and rapid spread of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization throughout Macedonia worried all the contenders who harboured aspirations and who plundered Macedonia. The most worried of all was the Exarchate circle which thought it had the right to own Macedonia. The Bulgarians were under the impression that they had the right to govern Macedonia and the Macedonian people and no one had the right to do anything without their knowledge and approval. They thought nothing could be undertaken without their consent that would lead to any changes in the life of the Macedonian people. The Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was born as a result of the terrible social and economic conditions in Macedonia and had nothing to do with Bulgaria. Its development, path, goals and aspirations were dictated by the Macedonian people’s historical need for their own freedom, and not from the policies and pretensions of the neighbouring countries.

The MRO was seen as a dangerous entity by the Bulgarians which worked against the Exarchate’s interests, and because of this the Exarchate authorities, without hesitation, decided to paralyze its activities. Having publicly proclaimed that the MRO was an Organization led by a bunch of “vagabonds” shows that these circles

were actually seriously concerned about the independent way the Organization had set off, which inevitably would lead to Macedonia's autonomy. Therefore, to prevent it from achieving its goals, they (Bulgarians) began to hinder MRO activities. They did this by infiltrating MRO ranks and by taking over its leadership. These infiltrators not only pretended to be anti-Exarchates but they appointed themselves leaders of the revolution and demanded that at least half of the Organization's ranks be filled by their people. Naturally their proposals were rejected outright and they were only allowed to join the Organization's ranks after they took an oath. But none of them wanted to take the oath. The oath would have obligated them to serve an organization whose principles were basically unacceptable to them and they did not want to fight for an Organization which worked against Bulgaria's interests.

When the "Exarchate side" found it difficult to "negotiate" itself into the MRO ranks, it took a different approach. Its people could not possibly stand there idle with their arms crossed while the MRO was spreading its branches far and wide in Macedonia and sailing into Solun and Tsari Grad. As the bearer of Great Bulgarian politics, the Supreme Committee in Bulgaria decided to confront the MRO. The Exarchate "party" inside Macedonia began to mimic the MRO.

The main players in this counter-revolutionary "party" were Vasil K'rchov, head of the Exarchate Department of Education in Tsari Grad, M. K. Sarafov, director of the two Exarchate gymnasiums in Solun, formerly a minister of the Bulgarian government, Ivan Garvanov, professor at the Exarchate Gymnasium in Solun, and others. All these people who were serving the Exarchate in Solun were of Bulgarian descent. So, no matter what action they took in everyday life in Macedonia it was taken for Bulgaria's interests in accordance with official Bulgarian policy. Several wealthy Macedonian merchants had joined them, but this does not change the fact that the main bearers of Exarchate politics in Macedonia, against whom the Macedonian intelligentsia fought, were known Bulgarian intellectuals who became the main bearers and organizers of the struggle against the MRO and the Macedonian people who were fighting for freedom and for self-determination.

Even though it was an insignificant minority, the Exarchate “Party” decided to form its own organization tasked with fighting against Ottoman slavery and opposing the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. The “Revolutionary Brotherhood” was formed in the spring of 1897 in order, as Ivan Garvanov himself had said, “to remove the Committee (the MRO Central Committee) from its evil path and to avoid the hassle of the revolution which, we think is premature, thinking that it will quickly break out.” (Memoirs - Damian Gruev, Boris, Sarafov, and Ivan Garvanov, Sofia, 1927, 116.) The real goals of the “Revolutionary Brotherhood”, led by Ivan Garvanov, according to Ivan H. Nikolov, member of the Central Committee, were to organize the masses “to be subordinate to the orders of the Exarchate and to the Macedonian Supreme Committee respectively”. (I. H. Nikolov, *Il. Ilinden*, IX, 2. Sofia, 1937.)

Attempts by the “Revolutionary Brotherhood” to expand its influence in Macedonia did not yield the expected results. Its agitation to “wait for help and to be freed by Bulgaria” was not acceptable to the Macedonian people. When the “Revolutionary Brotherhood” became aware of the fact that the Macedonian people did not want its help, it decided to start its own campaign and initiated a program to recruit “like-minded” (Bulgarophils) people to work against the revolutionary movement. The first step Garvanov took was to establish a relationship with the Supreme Committee and put himself in its service. He then wrote an extensive report (dated April 28, 1899) and sent it to the Sixth Congress of the Macedonian immigrant organization in Bulgaria (mentioned earlier), in which he described the MRO inaccurately, slandering its more senior leaders by calling them thieves, blackmailers, extortionists, slanderers, etc. In the same report he requested that the MRO leaders, especially Dr. Tatarchev, I. H. Nikolov and Giorche Petrov, be removed from the Organization’s leadership. Garvanov complained that the MRO had closed its doors to the people of the “Revolutionary Brotherhood” and was persecuting and intimidating them and if this situation continued the “Revolutionary Brotherhood” would be compelled to use force against the MRO. Garvanov was hoping that this report would put pressure on the MRO to work with the “Revolutionary Brotherhood” and place all

the revolutionary organizations under the banner of the Supreme Macedonian Committee (Bulgarian control).

Finding itself in danger of being liquidated by the MRO, the “Revolutionary Brotherhood” decided to send Garvanov to Bulgaria to link up with the Bulgarian state authorities and get their opinion on the matter and possibly their support in confronting the MRO. In Bulgaria, Garvanov first met with General Racho Petrov (who was loyal to King Ferdinand and President of the Bulgarian government) and then with Dr. Stoilov (former President of the Bulgarian government). Garvanov wanted to find out if the Bulgarian government was supporting the MRO Central Committee. Dr. Stoilov told him that the Bulgarian government not only “did not support” it but was totally against the MRO Central Committee. Garvanov also paid a visit to Radoslavov (whose party at the moment was in power) and he assured him that he was entirely behind Sarafov’s Committee. Garvanov then went to see the Supreme Committee and spoke with Sarafov who also agreed that the MRO posed a danger to Greater Bulgarian interests in Macedonia, and promised him that his Committee would do its best to achieve “agreement” with the MRO.

Everyone Garvanov met with in Bulgaria advised him to give up everything and come to terms with the “separatists” and with the “partisans”, or whatever the MRO leaders called themselves. All the people Garvanov consulted with in Bulgaria were well aware of the fact that the “Revolutionary Brotherhood” did not have the strength to fight the MRO, but could do far more for the supremacist cause if it infiltrated the MRO’s ranks. On the insistence of B. Sarafov, and thanks to H. Nikolov’s opportunism, “reconciliation” between the “Revolutionary Brotherhood” and the MRO Central Committee was achieved in September 1899, which called for members of the “Revolutionary Brotherhood” to be included in the ranks of the MRO. According to Sarafov: “This agreement was concluded against the wishes of the MRO representatives present at the meeting. By us sending a special person from outside (Lieutenant Ivan Kamburov was sent to Solun to perform the reconciliation) Giorche saw through our plan and foresaw the MRO Central Committee’s demise. We tried hard to convince him otherwise but he became even angrier. We thought there would be no

reconciliation. Giorche insisted that this process was fundamentally incorrect because in some ways it seemed that the Committee (in Sofia) was more concerned with satisfying certain ambitious groups, which wanted to infiltrate the Internal Organization as external elements, than it was in the MRO's revolutionary objectives... We lost Giorche's trust". (Boris Sarafov's memoirs, 50-51.)

It did not take too long to prove that Giorce Petrov was right. The inclusion of the "Revolutionary Brotherhood" in the ranks of the MRO proved fatal to the interests of the Organization. Up until 1901 Garvanov was not a factor in the movement (he was a member of the local Solun Committee) and he did not conspire against the MRO. But his chance came in January 1901, when members of the MRO Central Committee were arrested and imprisoned. Expecting to also be arrested, H. Nikolov invited I. Garvanov and Spas Martinov and showed them all the MRO's connections (codes, ink, channels, etc.). In other words he transferred (surrendered) all MRO Central Committee prerogatives into the hands of Ivan Garvanov. He surrendered the MRO to the Supreme Leadership and dropped it into the hands of its ideological and political opponent. (Krste Bitoski, Deity and the role of the "Revolutionary" fraternity in the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - History, IX, 2, Skopje 1975, 59-84.)

The Gemidzhii had profoundly unfavourable opinions of the "new MRO Central Committee" and saw it as an obstacle to the revolutionary movement's development. They went so far as to believe that if, for political reasons, members of the new Central Committee could not be "removed", then their functioning in Solun should be made very difficult if not impossible. And while relations between the Gemidzhii and the MRO Central Committee (which we will discuss later) remained stretched and unacceptable, relations with Sarafov remained favourable.

## **UNSUCCESSFUL MISSION IN TSARI GRAD - DIGGING A TUNNEL IN SOLUN**

Figuring that conditions for the moment were not ripe for organizing something big at home, Merdzhanov's group went to Sofia and linked up with Boris Sarafov, President of the Supreme Committee.

After some discussion, Sarafov approved their proposed plans and agreed to finance their actions.

After that S. Merdzhanov, Petar Mandzhukov and P. Sokolov left for Tsari Grad and, after a long deliberation, decided to assassinate Sultan Abdul Hamid. However, after months of studying the conditions and possibilities for pursuing this, they came to the conclusion that the possibilities of getting close to Abdul Hamid were limited. The only time the Sultan left the palace was when he went to prayer at the “Hamidie Dzhamisi” mosque, or on the fifteenth day of Ramadan when he went to the “Topkapi” mosque to celebrate the Prophet Muhammad’s holiday. Otherwise he remained in the “Ild’z Kioshk” (the palace in which the Sultan lived) which was like a fortress surrounded by high walls. His harem, buildings with living quarters, offices, gardens, ponds and the like were all inside those walls.

At first the assassins figured they could assassinate the Sultan with a bomb when he went to the “Tapkapi” mosque. However, they quickly came to the realization that their plan was cunningly unrealistic. While traveling to the mosque the Sultan was surrounded by thousands of soldiers. Besides, no one knew which road he was going to take; by wagon or by boat. Usually he went there one way and came back another way. He was also carefully guarded when he went to the “Hamidie Dzhamisi” mosque every Friday. Besides that he always held his audience about 300-500 metres away from himself and it would be very difficult to get close to him. On top of all that it was impossible to get permission to go inside the mosque and assassinate him inside. So their plans to assassinate him in those regards did not pan out.

Being convinced that they would not be able to assassinate the sultan, Merdzhanov’s group opted for bombing the Ottoman Bank building located on the main street which ran from Galata to Pera. The bank was owned by Western European capitalists. But due to the functions it performed, among other things, it also served as a treasury for the Ottoman state, and was considered more a state rather than a private bank.



Unfortunately the foundations of the Ottoman Bank could only be reached through an underground tunnel. To get to the bank's foundations the Gemidzhii rented a two-storey warehouse close to the bank. The building was rented out to them by Nancho Ctoianov who had it adapted as a "warehouse" to serve the Exarchate Organ "Novini" printing house. The slow, quiet and careful digging of the tunnel began inside this building. Unfortunately the pace of the work was very slow. As soon as they began to dig they ran into very hard ground. Because of this, they contacted the Gemidzhii in Solun and asked them to send a man to Tsari Grad so that they could work by two's in two shifts. Pavel Shatev was sent at the end of July 1900 to assist.

The work was hard and slow but centimetre by centimetre the tunnel was approaching the bank's foundations. The Gemidzhii were happy with their progress but soon came to the realization that they would soon need dynamite to blow up the bank's foundation, which they did not have and was not easy to come by. For this they sought advice from the Armenian revolutionaries with whom they maintained ties. Their friend, pseudonym Kozakov, promised to supply them with dynamite, but in order to get it he had to go to Batum. The dynamite actually arrived in Tsari Grad on a Russian ship, but due to carelessness it was discovered by the police and confiscated. Pretending to be a Russian subject, Kozakov barely managed to save himself.

Failure to acquire the dynamite caused immense disappointment among the Gemidzhii. Merdzhanov was so angry and frustrated he went mad for several days. Shatev wrote: "The three of us could hardly move. We were so melancholy we hardly came out of our apartments... We were so out of it nothing and no one could make us happy..." (P. Shatev, 116-117.)

Some time after the dynamite was seized, one by one, each of the four Gemidzhii were arrested on suspicion of being involved with importing the dynamite. As it turned out, the Ottoman authorities did not know anything about the dynamite and were unable to exact information from the arrested. The four were released after the Bulgarian diplomatic agent in Tsari Grad intervened. Because the three Gemidzhii were Bulgarian citizens, they were expelled to

Bulgaria. Shatev was sent back to Kratovo, his hometown. (After Merdzhanov, Mandzhukov and Sokolov arrived in Bulgaria, A. Kiprova was sent to Tsari Grad on a reconnaissance mission. Kiprova had made contact with the Central Committee in Solun and had promised Matov that he would inform him about the Tsari Grad tunnel. Kiprova went to the warehouse, inspected the tunnel, wrote an extensive encrypted report about it and dispatched it to Matov in Solun. The report arrived in Solun before the outbreak of the famous Solun contravention (January 1901) when the entire Central Committee was arrested. Unfortunately both Matov and Kiprova's report fell into the hands of the Ottoman government. Without delay the Ottoman authorities deciphered the report and sent it to the Sultan. However, the tunnel was discovered some time after the arrests and prosecution of those who dug it.) And so, even though the attempt ended without a blast at the bank, it brought fear into the heart of the Ottoman Empire and reminded Europe that conquered nations do not rest but seek their rights.

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In the meantime the Gemidzhii in Veles were preoccupied with the question of how to lay their hands on more money. It was decided to assign Meche and another member of the Veles Revolutionary Committee to kidnap a child, a student from a wealthy family, and extort ransom money. It was agreed that the teacher Prnarov, who knew about the plan, would take the students on a stroll outside the city. Two armed men, dressed in Albanian clothes, would suddenly jump in front of the children and grab a child and Prnarov himself. Unfortunately, a quick intervention by the authorities discovered that the "Albanian robbers", hiding in a cave with the child, were actually from Veles. They and the teacher were arrested and convicted. The Organization (MRO), however, did receive a "ransom" of 200 liras, but it is unknown if and how much of that ransom went to the Veles Gemidzhii. (H. Siliapov, *The Liberation Struggles in Macedonia*, Vol. 1, Sofia 1933, 248.)

The Gemidzhii left Veles and went to Solun with practically no money. They did not have the means to support themselves never mind to start anything meaningful. Kosta Kirkov came up with another idea. He decided to go back to Veles, grab the family's

precious jewels from his aunt and return to Solun. The moment his uncle discovered what Kosta was doing, he went to Solun. But in order to get the jewels back he had to pay the Gemidzhii 50 liras. (S. Simeonov 8. According to other information, the jewels were worth 36 liras.) The Gemidzhii now had the money to start something small.

In the spring of 1900, the same time Merdzhanov's group was planning to go to Tsari Grad Ortse was invited to go to Sofia. Ortse connected with Sarafov through Merdzhanov and told him what the Gemidzhii were trying to do but did not give him any details. Sarafov promised Ortse that he would help. The promised aid was going to arrive in Solun from Tsari Grad through Merdzhanov's group. However, while the conspirators in Tsari Grad were regularly financed and did not complain of lack of funds, the Gemidzhii were almost constantly without enough money. Shatev, who in Solun kept correspondence with the circle in Veles, Tsari Grad and Bulgaria, claims that once or twice he received money from Tsari Grad in the sum of 20 Napoleons (French gold coins). This money was for the needs of the Gemidzhii. And, while Shatev was sent to Tsari Grad to help the local circle, he was also expected to expedite the sending of money to Solun. (P. Shatev, 84 and 89.) And so it seems that the Gemidzhii received very little help from their connections in Tsari Grad. But, according to Organdzhiev, the Gemidzhii received no help at all: "We were hoping to receive money from the Tsari Grad group, but we received nothing..." (T. Organdzhiev, 119. S. Simeonov wrote that because the promised money did not come regularly, Ortse personally had to go to Tsari Grad to investigate the issue. According to Silianov, because of the failure to receive the promised money, Kirkov was obliged to take his aunt's jewelry.)

After meeting with Sarafov, Ortse returned to Veles and together with Pingov left for Solun.

Merdzhanov's group thought that because of the "drastic actions" it took in Tsari Grad, Europe would see the Gemidzhii as "anarchists". So, to avoid being labeled "anarchists" and to make themselves look like "revolutionaries", the Gemidzhii prepared to take similar "drastic actions" in several larger cities in the European part of the Ottoman Empire, especially in Macedonia and Odrin. When the

digging of the tunnel in Tsari Grad was in its advanced stages, Merdzhanov's group asked Ortse to start the same kind of work in Solun. Ortse accepted his proposal and invited his friends, who at the time were in Veles, to come to Solun. At this point in time Dimitar Koshtanov from Gorna Dzhumajia joined the Gemidzhii circle. Koshtanov was a trusted person who worked for the MRO Central Committee. He considered himself a "terrorist" but was very disappointed with the way the MRO Central Committee was handling things. As a result he left the MRO, joined the Gemidzhii and became one of the bravest members in its circle. At about the same time, in the spring of 1900, Pavel Shatev, who had finished his education in the gymnasium, was admitted to the circle so that, unlike the Tsari Grad circle, which numbered only three, the Solun circle was several times more numerous and more active at home, under quite different conditions.

After deciding that they would blow up the Ottoman bank in Solun, the Gemidzhii began to make plans to get close to the building's foundations and acquire the dynamite. To get to the Bank's foundation the Gemidzhii rented a small place near the bank and turned it into a barber shop. The place was located opposite the door of the hotel "Colombo" and because it was located on one of the major streets in Solun, it was necessary to furnish it with furniture appropriate for this part of the city. The Gemidzhii had to pay attention to every possible detail and to do that they spent more than ten Napoleons for the necessary barber shop furniture and tools. They registered Vlado Pingov as the owner of the barber shop. The place was ready and operational in about a week. Vlado Pingov was the "master" barber and Ilia Trchkov was his "apprentice". Their first customers were the Gemidzhii themselves, and gradually other people, including foreigners, began to visit the barber shop. Of course, given the fact that Pingov knew very little about the craft, some unpredictable situations could not be avoided, comical in their form but with quite dangerous consequences.

One day a well-dressed foreigner came into the barber shop and asked to be shaved fast because he was in a hurry. Pingov shaved him fast but did not do a good job so the stranger asked him to square up his beard. But because Pingov did not know how to do it, he tried to persuade the customer that his beard was fine the way it

was and there was nothing to fix. But because the customer insisted, Pingov was obliged to fix his beard hair by hair. Fortunately the foreigner interpreted the whole situation as a “language misunderstanding”. However, this incident prompted the Gemidzhii to think more seriously about their staff, and because the barber shop was located in the French neighbourhood, it was bound to be used by foreigners more often. They also realized that visiting and having conversations with Pingov in the barber shop was dangerous. It was not desirable to even be seen in Pingov’s barber shop, especially by some rich and prominent person from Veles or from Ohrid. Ortse solved some of these problems by asking Mardzhanov to send him someone from Tsari Grad who spoke Turkish or Greek but did not know the Macedonian language. Merdzhanov consulted with the Armenian Committee and they found him such a person. The young man they recommended was an Armenian named Kristi who knew both the Turkish and Greek languages well. Kristi presented himself as a “Greek” under the name K. Aristidi and worked as a barber in Pingov’s barber shop. By employing a “Greek” in the barber shop, the Turkish police did not suspect that the store could be used for the needs of the Macedonian revolutionaries.

The most important part of the barber shop for the Gemidzhii was the barber shop’s basement which was located 1.5 metres below street level. Ortse, Shatev and Kostanov were responsible for digging the tunnel. Shatev and Kostanov began to dig in July 1900. First they dug out a three metre vertical hole and then proceeded to dig out the tunnel horizontally. The soil was fine and the digging of the tunnel was easy and fast. The difficulty was the lighting. There was no electric lighting and ordinary battery powered flashlights did not emit enough light, so the work was done with candles. The digging was done with a chisel and shovel. Under no circumstances were they allowed to use a pick.

After digging a few metres horizontally, Ortse noticed that they were off course. They were going too much to the left and if they continued in that direction they would miss the bank. Having good knowledge of math, especially geometry, Ortse did some calculations and made the necessary corrections. Unfortunately this called for widening the tunnel and increasing the chances of the soil

collapsing on them. To prevent this, a certain amount of cement and a small amount of water were carefully brought into the barber shop. With the concrete they secured the tunnel.

At that same time the group in Tsari Grad reported that things were going badly there and asked for help. They also suggested that the tunnel digging in Solun be accelerated. And, as we mentioned earlier, Shatev was sent to Tsari Grad to help them.

The digging of the Solun tunnel was taken over by T. Organdzhiev and Ilia Popiordanov, who came to Solun from Veles especially for this. As they extended the length of the tunnel they ran into bad air, a problem that was solved by blowing air through a wide rubber hose. One person was sitting at the tunnel entrance blowing air while the other one dug. The tunnel was about 70 cm high and about 50 cm wide which forced them to work in a reclined position. Some of the excavated soil was scattered and compacted in the basement and the rest was taken out of the barber shop and thrown out into the sea or in other secure places.

On the way to the Bank the “diggers” ran into what appeared to be an old Roman wall, which was very difficult to break. As a result they only dug a small opening wide enough for one person to squeeze through. They called this place “Thermopolis”. After that there were no other serious obstacles. The tunnel was dug within a few months and the Gemidzhii now had access to the bank’s foundations. However, unexpectedly, it was far more difficult to obtain the required dynamite than it was to dig the tunnel. The Gemidzhii ran out of money and had to live under very difficult conditions. They spent very little supporting themselves in the summer and autumn, subsisting mainly on grapes and other fruits. Soon they had nothing to eat and became dependent on their compatriot Slavcho Korobarov, a student at the Gymnasium. Slavcho stole food from the boarding house and gave it to the hungry Gemidzhii, by throwing it over the boarding house wall.

Having no dynamite and no money to support themselves, the Gemidzhii once again realized that their plans did not pan out and they failed in their mission. They decided to leave Solun. The tools they worked with they buried in the tunnel. They also secured the

tunnel's opening and cleaned up the shop nicely, leaving no traces of their activities or of the tunnel. In December 1900 they abandoned the barber shop and most of them returned to Veles. (T. Organdzhiev, 118-120; P. Shatev, 87-89, 204; Silianov 249, 251; S. Simeonov, 10-11.)

Fortunately their work in Solun was not jeopardized with the discovery of the Tsari Grad group's activities. The Gemidzhii knew that too. Before Shatev was jailed in Kratovo he was escorted through Solun. In Solun, he deliberately passed by Pingov's barber shop (the policeman escorting him did not know the city) so that his comrades would see that he had been arrested. A few hours later T. Organdzhiev appeared at the gendarmerie prison, and only by accident saw Shatev being escorted by a policeman to the jail. Shatev managed to tell Organdzhiev that even though Merdzhanov's group had been arrested the police knew nothing about their activities. The tunnel had not been discovered and that everyone was okay. (It is interesting to note here that because P. Shatev did not have the money to pay for a ticket for the policeman who was escorting him, he and two other people in a similar situation had to go on foot from Solun to Skopje. The road led them through Kukush, Doiran, Strumitsa, Shtip, Sveti Nikole and then Skopje. From there Shatev traveled on a train to Kumanovo and on foot to Kratovo.)

In other words, the Gemidzhii had nothing to worry about and could resume their work. However, they, more than they should have, relied on the Tsari Grad circle for help, and were expecting it, although it was obvious that such help was hard to come by. And when Merdzhanov's group was shut down, the Gemidzhii found themselves somewhat confused and helpless. They could not achieve anything in Solun on their own because they seemed to think and expected that Merdzhanov's group was going to supply them the explosives. From now on, however, they would raise their own money and supply their own dynamite before planning any more such missions. But after this first serious failure, they spent the entire year (1901) in vain.

## **IN SEARCH OF MONEY AND DYNAMITE – DIGGING A NEW TUNNEL**

In 1901 the Gemidzhii were scattered all over. Most had returned home to Veles. D. Kostanov went to his home town in Gorna Dzhumaja (where, according to some sources, he was interned), P. Shatev was sent to Kratovo and some remained in Solun. Ortse it was said went abroad. “It was bad for all the Gemidzhii,” wrote Shatev. “But we were able to maintain links with letters...” (P. Shatev, 188.)

Most of the young people in Veles remained in close contact and tried to organize their lives around useful revolutionary subjects. They gathered together in houses, read books and discussed matters of importance. But in spite of all this it was difficult for them, especially the uncertainty of the prospects they had initiated. T. Organdzhiev admitted that their idleness in Veles caused a certain breakdown in the group. T. Bogdanov, K. Kirkov and Pingov fell into depression. It was very unpleasant for them standing idle and having nothing to do.

After staying several months in Macedonia (probably in Veles), Ortse Popiordanov went abroad to seek help. Sarafov was no longer president of the Supreme Committee and was in Switzerland. Ortse met with the leaders of the new Supreme Committee - General Ivan Konchev and Ivan Mihailovski - and tried to convince them that there was a need to take action against the European investments in the Ottoman state. But, it seems, no one was interested in hearing what he had to say. And when he did receive an answer he was told “such an act would be against Bulgarian interests...” (P. Shatev, the Solun Assassins..., 27.)

Ortse Popiordanov left Sofia and went to Geneva to seek help from Boris Sarafov, and to get acquainted with the Russian socialists who regularly visited Switzerland. After meeting with the Russians they pledged their full moral support. They also gave Ortse all sorts of revolutionary literature, a gift for the Gemidzhii.

Popiordanov also met with Sarafov, who at that moment was in possession of a large sum of money. He gave Ortse 10,000 leva, a



significant amount. At the same time Sarafov promised Ortse that he would send him 1,000 kgs of dynamite.

While in Kratovo in February 1902, Shatev received a telegram from P. Mandzhukov, which stated that “Vasko’s bride had died”. That meant that the tunnel in Tsari Grad had been discovered by the authorities and that Shatev was in danger of being arrested. Having no time to think, Shatev told his brother Ivan about the Tsari Grad tunnel and asked him for his help to get him out of the city. As it happened, Ivan and V. Karanfilov, the Kratovo headmaster (from Prilep), were leaders in the MRO Regional Committee and had the means to secretly take Pavel out of Ottoman territory and transfer him to Bulgaria. While in Bulgaria, Pavel Shatev met with P. Mandzhukov in Sofia from whom he learned everything that had happened over the past year and a half of his internment. He was told that Merdzhanov and Sokolov were killed. (In 1901 Merdzhanov and Sokolov, together with the Armenian revolutionary Bedros Seremdzhian, formed an armed unit and went to Odrin to attack the Orient Express, seize the post office and rob it. However, the attempt failed. After that the unit captured a young Turkish boy from a wealthy family and tried to get a ransom. But a large Ottoman army and the local Ottoman police went after them and liquidated them. Sokolov was killed in battle. Merdzhanov was caught, convicted and hanged in Odrin along with the Armenians Bedros and Onik Torosian.) When the tunnel in Tsari Grad was discovered the tunnel in Solun was immediately abandoned and none of the Gemidzhii in Solun were arrested or interned, except for D. Kostanov who was a suspect.

There were two assumptions about the discovery of the tunnel in Tsari Grad. The first assumption was that it had been discovered in a random search. After watching Nancho and Kiprovo going in and out of the warehouse, the police began to suspect something illegal was going on inside. Then when they went to check it out they discovered the tunnel. The second and most probable assumption was the discovery of Kiprovo’s secret report on the location of the tunnel, mentioned earlier. (Kiprovo was sent by Sofia to Tsari Grad to check out the warehouse. Kiprovo then sent a coded report to the MRO Central Committee in Solun during which time Tatarchev,

Matov and others were arrested and the secret report discovered and decrypted, which led to the discovery of the tunnel).

With the elimination of Merdzhanov and Sokolov and with the discovery of the tunnel in Tsari Grad, the Gemidzhii group in Tsari Grad ceased to exist. The Gemidzhii later would do what their experienced thinkers failed to do.

Ortse returned to Sofia from Geneva in April 1902. He was well impressed with the Russian revolutionaries he had met in Geneva and worried that the Gemidzhii lagged far behind in theoretical knowledge. Shatev wrote: “Ortse came with the money here (in Sofia). Then we saw that we could not compare with the Russian revolutionaries and we felt like we were a small group without leadership ideas; we relied more on instinct. We decided to act boldly as a small group, on our own.” (P. Shatev, 28.)

We need to reiterate that the Solun assassins had basic knowledge of socialist and anarchist theory. They, within the limits of their limited possibilities offered by a theocratic and backward regime, were well-read, well-versed and self-made. But, as we pointed out at the outset, they were far more interested in understanding the practical side of those theories than to penetrate the theoretical essence of certain social movements. Liberating Macedonia was their highest priority and by sacrificing their own lives as individuals they believed they could achieve that and spare the people a lot of pain. Their understanding of the liberation struggle was different than that of those conducting it by conventional means. The Gemidzhii were not only ready to sacrifice themselves, they were happy to do it for the freedom and sake of their people.

In that respect Ortse was especially distinguished. He was quite indifferent to the various theorizations and discussions. “Enough talk like some kind of parrots,” Ortse said to Shatev and Mandzhukov, who were delighted with the books he brought from Geneva. “Socialism and anarchism are not just subjects we study but subjects we must understand and assimilate. Unfortunately we are not able to do all that, we don’t have the time... the several years it takes... we will not be alive for that long. This is why we need to

apply what we do know of socialism and anarchism on Macedonian soil.” (P. Shatev, Macedonia under slavery, 225-226.)

Mandzhukov and Shatev met with Ortse’s views coldly and with a certain irony.

After all the failures in Tsari Grad and Solun, now that Ortse had money in his pocket and promised dynamite, he sought deeds and nothing else. He had already made plans to act without consulting the other Gemidzhii who were not even given the opportunity to make adjustments to his plans.

Before assigning tasks and carrying them out, Ortse, Shatev and Mandzhukov reviewed the situation in the Ottoman state, the revolutionary movement and the immigrant organization. As a result Ortse formulated the following:

The acquired experience and other conditions enable the Gemidzhii to become involved in the Macedonian revolutionary movement without contesting the preparations for a general armed uprising. But in regards to the attitude towards the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization which, at the time was at odds with the Supreme Committee, they concluded that like before, the Gemidzhii had nothing in common with the supremacists, who in the “struggle for the liberation of Macedonia were inspired by the Bulgarian government, which pursued its own goals and would not allow any revolutionary movement in Macedonia to succeed unless it was in Bulgaria’s state and party interests.” (Ibid, 226-227.) But, at the same time, the Gemidzhii could not operate in parallel with the “centralists” (MRO) because, even though their cause was right, there were still things of which they did not approve. The MRO Central Committee and a lot of the MRO District Committees were managed by persons who, according to their perceptions, even their aims and methods of struggle, differed only slightly from those of the supremacists, even though they were separate organizations.

The Gemidzhii decided to act in two or three major cities. They decided to act on their own without engaging a larger circle of people and would themselves bear the responsibility for their actions. Let the organization (MRO) re-educate the people. Let them

organize, arm and prepare them for the uprising. If it succeeds it will be good for Macedonia but, if for various reasons, it fails and a partial uprising takes place because of supremacist agitation, both organizations will bear the responsibility.

To Mandzukov's remarks that "the leaders of the Bulgarian political parties would take responsibility for all the mistakes and atrocities committed in the name of 'Mother Bulgaria' and in the name of 'the dear people and fatherland'...", Ortse replied: "I am not thinking of responsibility before the law, I am thinking of responsibility before history, which does not forgive anyone but gives them what they really deserve..."

The issue of printing propaganda was raised. Propaganda, it was suggested, would help explain part of the Gemidzhii role and perhaps engage others who would like to join the war against foreign capital. Ortse, however, was entirely against it. He did not want anything written, not even two or three brochures explaining the kind of war the Gemidzhii were involved in. "We haven't even proven to ourselves that we are or can be revolutionaries, how can we convince others?!" he said. "What's the use? If all this is about recruiting people in order to increase our circle, we have enough people... for the kind of work we are planning to do, we have many comrades who have been tested for years... they are in Veles, in Solun... and they are waiting for us to call on them..."

"As for history," said Ortse, "it too will evaluate our work... If other Macedonians see that our action yields results, they will follow their own initiative and start other similar actions. If they find out that our work is harmful, let the future and impartial historians judge us and our work with black letters... But remember actions are more beautiful and more convincing than plain words..." (Ibid, 228-230.)

Before Ortse returned to Macedonia, the Gemidzhii decided to recruit Dimitar Mechev, who at that time was working at the Pernik mine. Ortse, who knew Mechev and was well aware of his distrust and skepticism, decided to go to Pernik and meet him personally. After some discussion he managed to convince him that the Gemidzhii were now in a good position to do something and that him joining them could greatly benefit their cause. This would also

satisfy Mechev's personal ambitions - to act. Before Pernik, Mechev worked for the MRO. The MRO leadership in Veles had given him a mission to attack the Veles merchant Giorche Voinidzhaliev. Mechev, however, only wounded him with an ax, which was why he had to flee to avoid going to jail. As a result he left the MRO and went to Pernik. After that he left Pernik and joined the Gemidzhii.

Ortse put an end to discussions and convictions and put the Gemidzhii to work. It was agreed that Mechev and Shatev would temporarily remain in Sofia, P. Mandzhukov would leave for Plovdiv and Ortse would leave for Macedonia. Mechev was given the task to persuade P. Boshnakov to join the circle. Whether he did or not is unknown, but it is known that Boshnakov did not participate in the Solun assassinations.

P. Shatev left for Kiustendil. His task was to travel over Osogovo Mountain and deliver to Macedonia the dynamite that was kept in the village Rila.

Mechev went to Odrin under a pseudonym and stayed there for several months. There he rented a large property located near the Austrian post office. He presented himself to the authorities as a businessman who bought and sold flour, corn, bran, etc. His real mission, however, was to organize the digging of a tunnel to the post office in order to blow it up. However, the dynamite promised by Sarafov had not arrived, and the Gemidzhii decided not to do anything before acquiring the dynamite. At Ortse's request, Mechev returned to Sofia because it was unknown when the dynamite was going to arrive, and it was expensive keeping him in Odrin even though Mechev was the most frugal among the Gemidzhii.

Before leaving for Kiustendil Shatev met with Gotse Delchev, who recommended he see the head of the Kiustandil Organization. Shatev was told to connect with his people in Kochani and find a way to transfer about 80 kg of dynamite from Bulgaria to Macedonia. A pro-Russian government headed by Dr. Danev was in power in Bulgaria at this point in time. Dr. Danev undertook prudent measures to prevent the transfer of troops and weapons from Bulgaria to Macedonia. In the border regions and towns the police were strengthened. The villages were reinforced with extra security

of 5 to 6 people, with a special task to monitor the movement of suspicious persons and prevent them from crossing the border. Searches were carried out at the entrance of cities and villages and violators were arrested, tried and jailed with sentences up to three years in accordance with the law. These government measures created great difficulties for the people of the MRO who needed to go outside Macedonia to purchase arms and supplies. Some had to go to Greece to purchase arms. But because the number of Macedonians who immigrated to Bulgaria was large, their movement was especially restricted. The Bulgarian state, to serve its own interests, did not want these people helping Macedonia. It should be noted that all those government security measures taken by police, guards and soldiers, aimed at preventing the Macedonians from crossing the Turkish-Bulgarian border (to preserve good neighbourly relations between Bulgaria and the Ottomans) did not apply to the supremacists who crossed the border en masse in the fall of 1902 and started the famous “Gorno Dzhumaisko Uprising”.

Unfortunately, despite his stay in Kiustendil Region for several months, Shatev was unable to fulfill his task. In July 1902 a unit was sent from Bulgaria to Macedonia. In order to avoid the traps set by the authorities, the unit left Sofia and traveled on foot through Vitosha and came to the Radomir villages near the border. Shatev found out about the unit’s movements from E. Chuchkov and Marko Sekulichki. He asked for permission to accompany the unit across the border so that he could go to Kochani and arrange for the acquisition of the dynamite. He was escorted by a courier when he went in search of the unit. On his way he was caught by a government patrol and was arrested. Through connections, he was acquitted but he had to leave Kiustendil and return to Sofia. (Ibid, 234-248.)

P. Mandzhukov, who was tasked with coming back to Macedonia from Bulgaria in order to create a diversion on the Xanthi-Solun railway, also failed. He returned to Plovdiv and waited.

Gradually it became clear that, despite their great desires, the Gemidzhii were unable to fulfill their objectives with dynamite or to expand them to Bitola, Skopje, or Odrin. At first they limited

themselves to Solun and Odrin but, as we have shown, they soon withdrew from Odrin.

After assigning tasks to his people in Sofia, Ortse Popiordanov returned to Veles. His comrades there were impatiently expecting his return. Upon his arrival he acquainted his friends with the most recent news and informed them of the money he had received from Sarafov and Gotse Delchev (T. Organdzhiev claims that Ortse received 5,000 leva from Gotse Delchev). This opened up new opportunities for them including immediately resuming the work on blasting the branch office of the Ottoman Bank in Solun. Ortse, Kirkov and Pingov went to Solun while the others (Organdzhiev, Ilio Popiordanov, T. Bogdanov and Trchkov) temporarily remained in Veles. (T. Organdzhiev, 120). When they arrived in Solun, the Gemidzii were faced with an unpleasant fact. The old shop, the barber shop, was occupied by another person. The opportunity to use the already excavated tunnel was lost. Fortunately, given their past experiences with failure, this did not disappoint the Gemidzhii. Ortse rented another shop next to the old barber shop. Marko Boshnakov from Ohrid was registered as the owner and operator of the grocery store. No one in Solun knew Marko and he was the most suitable person for this delicate work. That is why he was sent to Solun.

The shop was supplied with the necessary inventory and commodities and resembled a real grocery store. The Gemidzhii made sure the place looked genuine and that no one would have reason to suspect anything. But, even though Marko was not known in Solun, there were people from Ohrid living in Solun who may have known him or people from Veles who knew some of the Gemidzhii. The Gemidzhii suspected that such people may pay a visit to the grocery store. They did not like the idea but there was nothing they could do.

They began digging the new tunnel in the basement and since the old tunnel was very close to the grocery store, the Gemidzhii decided to connect to it. This greatly facilitated their work and solved another serious problem, getting rid of the soil. The worst and most dangerous activity was taking the soil out of the store and disposing of it without being seen, a time-consuming and dangerous

task. Because all the excavated soil could not be kept in the basement some had to be taken elsewhere for disposal. Fortunately there was plenty of room in the free part of the old tunnel dug in 1900.

So, as it turned out, the old tunnel was not excavated in vain. Now, in 1902, it allowed the Gemidzhii to do their work quickly and safely and be masters of their destiny. We say masters because while they worked in the basement they acquired a certain amount of dynamite. Because of this they were no longer concerned about the grocery store being discovered. They now had the opportunity and the time to activate what little dynamite they had and leave without being caught. The Gemidzhii who were in the tunnel would have to die, of course, but it was completely in line with the spirit of their revolutionary philosophy. With some dynamite in hand, there was no chance now that the Gemidzhii would allow a repeat of the Tsari Grad tunnel to take place here. "The Bank in Solun would not be ruined," wrote Shatev, "and our mission might not be completely successful but, for disclosure, at least here we would be doing something as opposed to doing nothing." (P. Shatev, 257.)

After their missions were carried out, various assumptions were made about the ideological purpose of the Gemidzhii, their goals, relationships and the like, as well as the origin of the dynamite they used. It was said that the supply of dynamite was the most serious problem that the Gemidzhii had to solve. This problem they solved mostly on their own. The first batch of dynamite to arrive in Solun came via Tsari Grad. As hard as they tried, the Gemidzhii failed to send dynamite through Kochani and Veles, as Shatev had planned. The elaborate plan to bring the dynamite to Solun began with Ortse requesting to have Anna Shepetz moved from Sofia to Tsari Grad and placed under their disposal. The dynamite from Kiustendil was brought to Sofia and from there to Tsari Grad. It was transported through Milan Sazdov, a waiter working on the train traveling on the Belgrade-Tsari Grad line. The Gemidzhii divided the dynamite into small packages and initially carefully delivered them to Milan first hand. But because it was dangerous to be seen with Milan, the Gemidzhii then began to hide the packages in the toilet of a certain wagon when the train was resting in the station. The dynamite was then picked up by Milan at his convenience when the train was



moving. When he arrived in Tsari Grad Milan passed the dynamite to Anna Shepets. Milan, like Anna, consciously and voluntarily exposed himself to great danger by putting himself in the service of the Gemidzhii. He knew he was transporting dynamite but he never became interested in what the dynamite was going to be used for in Tsari Grad. He knew that he was serving the Macedonian Revolutionary Movement in aid of liberating Macedonia - and that made him happy.

Anna also exposed herself but to an even greater danger than Milan. In the event the dynamite was discovered on the train, Milan had the opportunity and chance to be saved by denying that he had any connection with such a shipment. However, the discovery of the dynamite at Anna's home (as well as while Milan was transporting it from the train station to her home) meant a long prison sentence if not death.

The dynamite was then transported from Tsari Grad to Solun in two barrels labeled fish. With this dynamite in their possession, the Gemidzhii could have blown up the bank in Solun during the second half of 1902. However, they thought that the dynamite could be better used for "wider action" and decided to wait for more dynamite to arrive, the dynamite that was promised by Boris Sarafov.

## **COLLISION WITH THE MRO CENTRAL COMMITTEE**

The digging of the tunnel in 1900 and the Gemidzhii movement after Solun did not attract the MRO Central Committee's attention and did not create any serious problems in the relationship between the MRO Central Committee and the Gemidzhii. Now, however, mainly due to Ivan Garvanov's tactlessness and inability to establish good relations with the Gemidzhii and to convince them to take into account the wider interests of the revolutionary movement, relations between them turned bad and even unruly. This very much complicated the situation and became detrimental to the development of revolutionary events in Macedonia.

Ivan Garvanov wrote to Gotse Delchev several times complaining that Ortse Popiordanov, Kosta Kirkov and Ilia Trechkov campaigned

in Solun, Kukush and Veles against the MRO. When he was in Kukush, Ortse reportedly ridiculed the MRO people and so did some of the other Gemidzhii. In general, Garvanov tried to convince Delchev that the Gemidzhii had a negative influence and that something should be done to stop it.

In 1902 when Ortse went to Sofia to discuss the dynamite supply issue, Delchev spoke to him about the deteriorating relations between the Gemidzhii and the MRO Central Committee and specifically about Ivan Garvanov's problem with him.

But despite Ortse's indignation for Garvanov's unjustified slanders and intimidation directed against him and the Gemidzhii, Ortse expressed his own opinion. He told Delchev that if any of the Gemidzhii in Solun, Veles or any other place were harmed by the people from the MRO Central Committee, they would not look for the killer but would take revenge by killing members of the MRO Central Committee. Delchev, who always sympathized with the Gemidzhii, promised Ortse that he would write about this to the Central Committee and that things would be settled.

Unfortunately relations between the Gemidzhii and the MRO Central Committee could not be easily patched up. Garvanov did not like the arrangement and felt like he was being shaken down by the Gemidzhii in Solun. This arrangement, Garvanov thought, could only be achieved by force. However, it was never a good idea to use force against the Gemidzhii, the very people who were ready to give up their lives at a moment's notice. Besides, Ortse repeatedly told Garvanov that if his people (executioners) tried to kill any of the Gemidzhii in Solun or Veles, he would hold Garvanov responsible and Garvanov himself would pay with his own life. "Ivan Garvanov," wrote Shatev, "knew Ortse Popiordanov very well since he had been a student, and got to know him even better after he had the opportunity to meet with him. Garvanov was familiar with Ortse's determination, hardness and courage..." Other members of the MRO Central Committee, who were in agreement with Garvanov, were always kind to the Gemidzhii. The so-called "executioners" who worked for the MRO Central Committee were well aware of Ivan Garvanov's relationship with the Gemidzhii, but would not take any action against them.

Relations between the MRO Central Committee and the Gemidzhii fell to their lowest in the beginning of 1903. As promised, Boris Sarafov did buy the dynamite and, through Marseilles, sent it in 17 barrels marked medicine against phylloxera. The barrels were sent to the Dede-Agach customs house, because custom control in Solun was much stricter. When the dynamite arrived Ortse made a deal with a Greek merchant named D. Evangelidis to have it picked up at the Dede-Agach customs depot and deliver it to Solun. Ortse offered Evangelidis 100 lira, half to be paid before the job and half upon delivery of the dynamite. But, as it turned out, Evangelidis was close to Professor A. Naumov (brother-in-law) who worked at the Exarchate gymnasium with Garvanov and was in part responsible for the formation of the “Revolutionary Brotherhood”, mentioned earlier. Before leaving for Dede-Agach, Evangelidis told Garvanov Ortse’s secret. Garvanov, who was more afraid of the Gemidzhii than he was of the Ottoman authorities, decided to prevent this large amount of dynamite from falling into Gemidzhii hands. He told Evangelidis that the “goods” actually belonged to the MRO and that Ortse and his companions were working for the MRO. He then advised Evangelidis to hand over the dynamite to another person, appointed by Garvanov himself. The dynamite was to be handed over as soon as it was taken out of the customs house. Garvanov told Evangelidis that the person who was going to pick up the dynamite would pay him the rest of the money.

After waiting for 2 to 3 days and having heard nothing from Evangelidis, Ortse became concerned and decided to go to Dede-Agach. He looked for Evangelidis but he was nowhere to be found. Ortse figured the dynamite had been discovered and confiscated, and that the Greek was locked up in a jail somewhere. He also began to think that maybe the dynamite had never been sent. At the request of the Gemidzhii, Sarafov ordered an investigation into which “goods” had been picked up from the customs depot on January 17, 1903 (Shatev was in possession of a copy of this document). Ortse later found out that the “goods”, 1,000 kg of dynamite, had arrived at the Dede-Agach customs depot and were picked up by Evangelidis through commissioner Dzhan Milidsanis. But after that the dynamite was discovered and confiscated by the authorities, the

commissioner was arrested and taken to Odrin, while Evangelidis fled to Athens.

Later, when the Gemidzhii were all arrested and sent to Edi-kule prison in Solun, Garvanov denied that he had anything to do in connection with this dynamite.

“I don’t know anything about this and I have contributed nothing to the disappearance of any dynamite,” he said.

This is what Boris Sarafov said in regards to the disappearance of the dynamite: “I bought 1,000 kg of dynamite so that they could do some serious damage in Solun. We bought it in Paris. It was melinite and did not look like any ordinary dynamite that the Turks might be familiar with (it was a yellow powder, 1,000 packets weighing 1 kg each). We thought that it would be possible to pass it through the Turkish customs offices as a cure for phylloxera. I called on a Greek from Solun who introduced us to another Greek from Dede-Agach and we shipped him two drums of the real cure against phylloxera. They easily passed through the customs house. We then sent the melinite but the doctor in Dede-Agach decided to have it tested. He sent a sample to Tsari Grad and discovered that it was dynamite. The Turks threw the dynamite into the sea. The Greek escaped to Athens.”

So according to Sarafov the dynamite was seized in the customs depot, but according to the Gemidzhii it was seized after it was taken out of the customs depot. But the question of Garvanov’s role in this affair still remains unanswered. To their end the Gemidzhii remained convinced that Ivan Garvanov was somehow responsible for losing their dynamite. (Ibid, 264-265, H. Silianov, 252; Memoirs - Damian Gruev..., 72. Simeonov and T. Organdzhiev wrote that the dynamite was lifted by Garvanov.)

The end result; the Gemidzhii lost the long-anticipated shipment of explosives. Even Ortse was surprised. Despite his bad relations with the MRO Central Committee, he never thought that Garvanov would go this far. However, as a sober realist, he immediately asked his comrades in Bulgaria to find him more dynamite and send it to him in Solun.

With the loss of the dynamite the Gemidzhii had to curb their activities but not their hatred for Garvanov. Their hatred for him grew in proportion to their torment and difficulties in procuring more dynamite. Their desire to take revenge on Garvanov at any cost became an integral part of their mission.

Knowing this, Garvanov asked for their removal from Solun. "His greatest wish was," wrote Shatev, "to remove us (the Gemidzhii) from Solun at any cost even if we had to die in some prison cell, only if we were not in Solun, where he wanted to be safe to pursue his goals as a violent leader of a movement of which he soon became an adversary, and now, after one incident in a series of complicated events, he became a leading figure." (Shatev, 293-294.)

Garvanov's attempts to "discipline" the Gemidzhii from the point of view of the Organization's interests could be justified. Looking through the prism of those interests, the prevention of a thousand kilograms of dynamite from coming into the hands of a bunch of "undisciplined" assassins could also be justified. However, the question is: "Was Garvanov truly guided by the interests of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization or did he do this for personal reasons? There are reasons to believe that Garvanov despised the Gemidzhii for purely personal reasons. If he truly believed that the Gemidzhii were "dangerous" then why not stop them everywhere in Macedonia, why only in Solun? Months before the Ilinden Uprising, Garvanov proposed that Ortse Popiordanov be given some money to carry out "similar" missions outside of Solun, perhaps in Skopje, Veles, even in Bitola. It would appear that Garvanov wanted to remove the Gemidzhii from Solun, away from him and his activities which served Bulgarian interests. Starting something in Bitola Region, for example, where the MRO was very strong and preparing for a massive uprising, could take attention away from Solun and from Garvanov who wanted to use the MRO more as a means of achieving goals that had little to do with the efforts of the people for the emergence of an autonomous Macedonia.

In describing the general characteristics of the MRO Central Committee headed by Garvanov, P. Shatev, among other things, correctly wrote:

“The members of the new Central Committee were all inexperienced compared to the old members Dr. Tatarchev, P. Toshev, Hadzhinikolov and Hristo Matov who were arrested in 1901. They were mainly teachers and merchants who were primarily working on their own jobs. Leading the MRO for them was a sideline activity. Unfortunately the Organization was so centralized that even the most minute activities needed decisions from the Central Committee in Solun. However, measures undertaken by the IMRO required much more attention than was actually provided. The activities undertaken were difficult even for professional and experienced revolutionaries, such as responding to propaganda, agitation, preparation, training, let alone managing revolutionary activities in the whole of Macedonia.

As a result of the Central Committee’s incompetence and passivity the Organization’s leadership strands were lost and the IMRO in fact became a fully decentralized organization.

For practical purposes the MRO Central Committee in Solun might have been non-existent but at the same the Committee had a growing desire to keep its hands in everything and wanted all the revolutionary regions to come to it. But, in cases where the Committee was not familiar with the local conditions, it did more damage than good to the movement. The members of the new Central Committee were nothing more than just ordinary people. They were selected randomly from a pool of people who wanted to benefit from serving the Exarchate and improve their own positions in society...” (Ibid, 290-294. Garvanov in his short memoirs devotes only one page to the Gemidzhii. Most of the information provided was incorrect – Memoirs... Ivan Garvanov, 135.)

Because they never did and did not want to have any connection with the MRO Central Committee in Solun, because they did not interfere in MRO affairs and never tried to spread their ideology and their way of struggling among the general population, the Gemidzhii felt that Ivan Garvanov had no right and no basis to hate them. The

new MRO Central Committee had no right to think that Solun was an exclusive area for MRO action and to challenge the right of others and the Gemidzhii to fight in the same city. In other words (the Gemidzhii reasoned), nobody had the right to challenge their desire to die in their native country, “in Macedonia’s capital city”.

It is understandable that nobody had the right to challenge the desire of members of the Gemidzhii circle to fight for Macedonia’s freedom. However, their opinion that, since they were not members of the Organization, its Central Committee had no right or interest in their actions, in principle, was incorrect. Just because the composition of the new Central Committee did not have the necessary moral and political qualities and could not properly manage the Macedonian people’s liberation struggle, the interests of an entire revolutionary movement could not be ignored.

However, the strained relations did not lead to an open conflict between the two sides. And despite the fact that Garvanov, in addition to slandering them, threatened to use force to remove them from Solun, there was no physical conflict between the MRO and the Gemidzhii. The Gemidzhii were determined to endure and avoid any incident that could be a cause for their removal, while Garvanov, for many reasons, even fearing for his own life, never sent his “executioners” against them. (Garvanov claims that at one point the Central Committee threatened the Gemidzhii that if they didn’t leave Solun they would all be executed. So they left the city for two days. How much of this is true we don’t know.) After the 1,000 kg dynamite was captured, Garvanov did not believe that they would be pursuing a different avenue to obtain more explosives.

Due to lack of sufficient dynamite, the Gemidzhii definitely gave up the idea of expanding their actions outside of Solun. The dynamite that they had already acquired could not even satisfy their needs in Solun. That is why they decided to get more dynamite... at any cost.

In 1902 melinite was purchased from abroad and sent to the Macedonian border to be used by the Organization in Bulgaria. The Gemidzhii used this opportunity to purchase 200 kg of it. P. Shatev was assigned the task of organizing its transfer to Solun. The melinite was stored in Kiustendil, near the border. To do this Shatev

contacted Todor Aleksandrov whom he knew from before. In 1902/1903 Alexandrov was a teacher in Kochani and a member of the local MRO leadership. Based on conversations he had with Shatev while Shatev was interned in Kratovo, Alexandrov knew a little something about the Gemidzhii and their intentions so he decided to help them. Shatev shipped the melinite to the village Sasa in Bulgaria where it was received by Gero, an experienced courier, working for the MRO. The melinite was then transferred from Sasa to Kochani. It was transported hidden in hay because this route was frequently used for transporting hay at this time of year. The melinite was divided up into shipments of 20-30 kg and transferred to Kochani. (While Shatev claimed that the melinite, about 200 kg, was purchased, T. Organdzhiev (cf. his article, 121) wrote that the dynamite, about 100 kg, was stolen somewhere in Iambol Region.)

The main trade commodity in Kochani was rice. Transporting anything else could easily cause suspicion in the competent government authorities. It was also a volatile time (beginning of 1903) when there was a strong movement of battalions, couriers, weapons... being transferred throughout all of Macedonia. In other words, preparations were being made for the uprising. Clashes with the Ottoman army and police became very common, and distrust by the authorities towards everything that was Christian was reaching new heights. Transferring the dynamite under these conditions, which had to be transported along the imperial road to Veles and from there by rail to Solun, was really an unpredictable and dangerous task. However, that task was successfully performed by T. Organdzhiev.

Organdzhiev went to Kochani, connected with the people who kept the dynamite and arranged for its transfer. Every Tuesday, on market day, the “tenants” transported 1 to 2 loads of rice to Veles. A few kilos of dynamite were hidden in each bag. Unfortunately even rice was not spared from being checked. The inspectors checking the rice, to make sure nothing was smuggled, usually looked for tobacco. They would poke the rice bags with a special iron rod. But in order not to have their bags poked it was common for the “tenants” to offer the inspectors bribes.



When the rice arrived at the designated Inn in Veles, it was picked up by Todor Organdzhiev and transferred to his uncle Nikola Organdzhiev's house.

Todor Organdzhiev then took the dynamite out of the rice sacks and placed it in oil cans. The weight of the dynamite in the cans had to correspond to the weight of the oil. After that the cans had to be properly sealed by a skilled person who could be trusted. From there the dynamite cans, together with the oil cans, were transported to Solun by rail and delivered to a designated address. The first shipment of two cans to arrive in Solun was picked up by Ortse and Kosta. The inspectors wanted to check the cans but while Ortse and Kosta were arguing about how much to bribe him, their helper, a Gypsy boy, grabbed the cans and, while the inspector was distracted, took them away. They did the same with the next four shipments.

In the end the Gemidzhii had about 280 kilograms of dynamite in their possession. The tunnel to the Bank had already been dug and there were no plans to dig another tunnel in Solun or anywhere else. This meant that from this moment forward they were ready to act. There was less dynamite than what they had in mind but it was enough to carry out their mission in Solun.

## **SOLUN RESOLUTION FOR UPRISING - RELATIONS WITH DELCHEV**

After almost three years of preparation and ups and downs, the Gemidzhii were finally ready to act. But during one fateful moment! They were ready to act exactly at the time when the general uprising was expected to start in Macedonia.

The Supreme Committee, which in front of Europe saw itself as an expression of the interests of the oppressed Macedonian population and wanted to play a decisive role in the liberation struggle in Macedonia, decided for the second time to raise an "Uprising" in Macedonia. The first time it raised the "Melnik Uprising" in 1895. On September 23, 1902, Supreme Committee Commander T. Saev's Chetniks killed several spies in the village Zheleznitsa, Gorno Dzhumai Region, which prompted the Ottoman army to attack the village and start a conflict. With this began the so-called historical

supreme actions, known as the “Upper Dzhumaisko Uprising”. These actions, with many breaks in between, lasted until mid-November 1902. The largest number of Supremacists to come out of Bulgaria and join the battles was 400. The conflict encompassed about 30 Macedonian villages from several regions, half belonging to Dzhumai Region, and dragged them into the fighting. The armed actions were led by well-known supremacist officers headed by Supreme Committee Vice President General Tsonchev.

The “uprising”, as expected, was soaked in blood. And even though the Great Powers intervened in earlier conflicts, this time they did nothing. The High Port (Ottomans) promised that it would respond less violently to any movement in Macedonia through its regular army and use minimum force. But in the end it broke that promise. About 15 villages were destroyed, robbed and burned down, 45 people were killed, hundreds were tortured, 110 women were raped and about 2,000 people fled across the border. The entire population in the region covered by the supremacist uprising, during the fighting and later, was placed under a very difficult situation.

Naturally, Gotse Delchev, Giorche Petrov, Iane Sandanski, Dimo Hadzhi Dimov and many other MRO leaders were outraged and sharply opposed this disastrous supremacist policy towards Macedonia and especially this supremacist infiltration and preparation to start fires in various places in Macedonia. Unable to prevent the supremacist instigated uprising, the MRO invested all its forces and energy to limit it and minimize its severity and consequences for the Organization and for the population. Thanks to MRO’s quick reaction and the perception of a good part of the population involved in the uprising, the supremacists were stopped from expanding the fire. The Supremacists and their associates had lied and misinformed the Macedonian people in this region and, in large part, they were forced to rise. The supremacist killings and assaults provoked the Ottoman army to respond by attacking the villages which in turn forced the people to defend themselves or run away. Accordingly, the Macedonian participation in this supremacist uprising did not consciously and voluntarily join the supremacist troops in some form resistance but joined them to defend themselves against the Ottoman attacks. (K. Bitoski, 237/283; Manol Pandevski, *The Ilinden Uprising in Macedonia 1903*, Skopje 1978, 19-30.)

The “Gorno-Dzhumai Region Uprising”, similar to the “Melnik Uprising” of 1895, did cause damages to the Macedonian national liberation struggle. Linking the failure of the Ilinden Uprising with the negative influence of the Supremacist “Gorno-Dzhumai Region Uprising”, Dimo Hadzhi Dimov, in his famous article entitled “The Ilinden Uprising and lessons learned...”, among other things, wrote: “The Ilinden Uprising failed because it was previously compromised by another, an artificial ‘uprising’ called ‘Dzhumaisko’... But the sins of the ‘Dzhumaisko uprising’ are not the only ones. This artificial uprising, however, was directed against the Internal Organization and created the conditions for failure... and at the same time embraced the idea that this was a supremacist insurrection. The authors of the ‘Dzhumaisko’ adventure, who acted on behalf of the Bulgarian government and the Bulgarian court, as they did in 1895, gave the Ottomans all the trump cards and later gave them to the Serbians and Greeks, who always viewed Macedonia with greed. It gave them the idea that the Macedonian population was simply an instrument for implementing internal policies by an internal state actor and, consequently, plans should be made and measures taken to eradicate the internal actor. So, the “Gorno-Dzhumai Region Uprising” was a blow not to the Ottomans, but to Macedonia itself and to its ideals...”

Armed supremacist action in Macedonia spurred the great powers, especially Russia and Austro-Hungary, as the “most interested” parties in the events in Macedonia, to speed up the preparation for reforms, hoping that in this way they would calm down the revolutionary atmosphere in Macedonia and ease the turbulent events. The Great Powers were all categorical against violating the status quo in Macedonia, i.e. they were against any serious changes in this part of the Balkans and hence, more or less, were against the Macedonian revolutionary movement. In other words, they were against an internal uprising and against an external intervention to start an uprising.

On top of the facts mentioned above, which were well-known to all those who played an important role in the MRO, the new Central Committee decided to start an uprising in Macedonia anyway. The main initiator for this uprising was Ivan Garvanov. Garvanov, like

the rest of the Supreme Committee, did not want Macedonia liberated and becoming an autonomous state. He wanted to create the right conditions for Macedonia to be annexed by Bulgaria. Therefore, he did not see the upcoming uprising as an act that would have contributed to the liberation of Macedonia, he understood this to be a wider armed action, a continuation of the ‘Dzhumaisko uprising’ that was provoked by the Supreme Committee, which would exacerbate the Macedonian question even further. More precisely, he worked within the framework of the policy built in Sofia which foresaw clashes, pressures, rattling, propaganda and the like, creating the necessary atmosphere for the forthcoming “liberation” (and occupation) of Macedonia by the Bulgarian army.

It is not surprising that Garvanov and his companions exacerbated the uprising, even though they knew in advance that the MRO was not ready and conditions for an uprising were not even at their minimum. In the circular letter he sent out on January 6, 1903, Garvanov called for a Solun Congress to take place. The letter was sent out, more or less, immediately after the suppression of the Gorno-Dzhumaisko supremacist uprising, but also after another important event. Namely, in December of the same year, members of the Belgrade, Sofia and Vienna governments visited Count Lamsdorf, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Count Lamsdorf firmly ordered the Bulgarian government in the name of his imperial government, as well as in that of Vienna, not to allow any changes to take place in this part of the Balkans and asked the representatives of the Macedonian immigrants in Bulgaria and those of the MRO (Dr. Tatarchev and Hristo Matov) who he had met to take care to end all “disorders” in Macedonia. They were told that Russia and Austria-Hungary, with the help from the other major powers, would solve the Macedonian question through reforms.

On the question: “What will the Great Power do should an uprising take place in Macedonia?” Lamsdorf and the other Great Power representatives all unanimously said: “We will allow the Ottomans to stifle it!” Those factors in the Macedonian movement whose heart was in the interest of the Macedonian people found it hard to accept this; the direction the Great Powers had taken. The Macedonian revolutionary movement had developed legally and in accordance with historically established law. Its aims were to liberate

Macedonia and therefore the MRO found it very difficult to subordinate itself and work in the interest of external factors, even if those external factors were Great Powers. It is true that the MRO saw the uprising as a means of realizing its liberation program but not as a timely objective. It was completely normal to think that the uprising would take place... but only when the conditions inside were right. The uprising would begin when the necessary internal conditions were met and when there would be minimum foreign interference. The history of the Balkan Liberation Movements have taught us that the Balkan peoples (Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians) expelled the Ottoman authorities during a time of great political turmoil in Europe in which even the Ottomans participated, and with the help of the Great Powers, especially with Russian help. But, when the uprising in Macedonia was decided, Europe was at peace and all the powers in Europe were on the Ottoman side. Relations were such that it was clear to everyone that the streams of blood the Macedonian people would spill would never touch any of the Great Powers and none of them would stand firmly on Macedonia's side. For their own interests Russia and the other Great Powers were determined not to allow the Macedonian people to succeed in liberating themselves. Of course both Garvanov and Anastas Lozanchev, president of the Bitola District Committee, as well as other factors, knew this very well but went ahead with starting the uprising.

Almost all historical arguments support the opinion that Garvanov's initiative for convening the Solun Congress in January 1903, and his decision to start a general uprising in the coming spring, was a great conspiracy against the Macedonian National Liberation Movement. The manner in which the convention was convened, the profile of the majority of persons who attended it (appointed as opposed to being democratically elected), the people attending it, the arguments used by Garvanov to persuade the "delegates" to start an uprising early... all point to the fact and unequivocally confirm that the elements who wanted to start the uprising were well-aware that the aim of this uprising was not to liberate Macedonia, but for the Supreme Committee to create the right conditions for Bulgaria to annex Macedonia regardless of the bloodshed and destruction it would bring to the Macedonian people.

In order to win over the Congress Delegates, especially the reluctant ones, to vote for the uprising, the Central Committee declared that it “took into account the mood and interest of European diplomacy in regards our people’s work”, and that Garvanov himself had called on the French Ambassador to Tsari Grad, who reportedly said: “If an uprising starts in Macedonia, it will surely be given broad rights.” Garvanov also said: “If the uprising lasts for more than two weeks, Bulgaria will enter the war.” (H. Silianov, 197). These statements made by the Central Committee and by Garvanov, and presented to the Congress, were all lies. The French ambassador said no such thing and neither did the Bulgarian government promise to enter into a war.

Garvanov conveniently “forgot” to inform the Congress about what Count Lamsdorf had said and about the Great Power attitude towards an uprising in Macedonia. This information was widely circulated in Europe and should have been very familiar to all the Delegates. But, despite all this, the only representative to oppose an early uprising was L. Dimitrov from Seres Region, who reminded the Congress that Gotse Delchev and Iane Sandanski were also against such an uprising. Unfortunately, Gotse, Iane and many like them from the MRO, who were against an early uprising, were not invited to the Congress. Dimitrov also informed the Congress that the Great Powers did not want an uprising in Macedonia at this time. He also reminded them of the Russian Government’s argument and position, which categorically did not want “disorder” in Macedonia.

Even though the entire world did not want an early uprising in Macedonia, the Solun Congress decided to have one anyway. Great credit for this should be given to A. Lozanchev who, without asking any of the regional leaders, advocated for a general Macedonia wide uprising on behalf of the Bitola Revolutionary District. Later, during the MRO District Congress, held in Smilevo, some of the Delegates were strongly criticized for not exercising their own will to oppose him.

From the scanty documents available describing events that took place during the Congress, there was no indication that the actions of the Gemidzhii were even considered. S. Simeonov, however, wrote that the Congress was determined to “remove the actions of

the conspirators”. (St. Simeonov, 14-15). Garvanov was obliged to point out to the Gemidzhii the following arguments: “The uprising that was to be raised would fail if the intelligentsia did not lead the insurgents. And if the Gemidzhii acted there would be consequences for the intelligentsia; they would all go to prison and the uprising would be crushed.”

The Gemidzhii reportedly agreed to postpone their actions until after the uprising, but were not willing to give them up. However, the Central Committee did not agree with them and “wanted to take over everything and frustrate every action...”

Then, wrote Simeonov, it was decided to either kill or poison all the Gemidzhii but there was no one willing to do it. The Central Committee subordinate authorities “were disappointed with their leaders and fully sympathized with the Gemidzhii”. On the other hand, Garvanov and his men appeared to have come to the conclusion that it was too late to undertake such drastic measures to prevent the Gemidzhii from acting in Solun. Also, due to the nature of their work, the Gemidzhii were very cautious. They could not all be killed at the same time and those who survived would still act and do damage including blowing up the Bank. The dynamite was in the tunnel and was “waiting” to be activated.

Garvanov and his close associates from the Central Committee saw the Gemidzhii as obstacles and fundamentally harmful to their work. They were regarded as young men infected by some false teachings (socialism, anarchism) who tried to apply those teachings on Macedonian soil without understanding them. They treated them like “adventurers”, like people without a homeland and the like. And, most importantly, they were considered dangerous because their actions in Solun were jeopardizing, most of all, the Central Committee’s personal security.

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Outside of the MRO Central Committee, the revolutionaries who belonged to the Gemidzii circle maintained good relations with the MRO and separately with its most authoritative member - Gotse Delchev. Even though the Gemidzhii did not want to have

connections with the people and with the MRO, that connection was maintained especially during critical times and when help was needed. Delchev was always ready to help and did help the Gemidzhii. The MRO, on the other hand, hardly requested the circle's services except when the Central Committee was headed by Dr. Tatarchev in 1900. Tatarchev asked S. Merdzhanov, then leader of the Tdari Grad group, to appeal to the Exarchates to appoint his people teachers in the Macedonian cities in a manner proposed by the Central Committee. But a serious dispute emerged which became the principle cause in the deteriorating relations between the Gemidzhii and the MRO Central Committee. "Until that time," wrote Shatev, "we did not have any relationship with the IMRO Central Committee, and we did not want to have any..." Mandzhukov in particular appeared to be against any kind of relations with the Central Committee. The Gemidzhii, according to Mandzhukov, had no point of contact with the Central Committee and did not want to have one either. And, therefore, there was no need to be in the service of the Central Committee. The MRO did its business one way, using separate methods of action, and the Gemidzhii did their business in another and quite different way.

But the question is: "What did the assassins and those in Tsari Grad think, as opposed to the Gemidzhii in Macedonia and in Solun, the centre of the revolutionary movement." Merdzhanov's group had little to do with Macedonia. As we have seen, shortly after the Tsari Grad failure the group collapsed. Merdzhanov and Sokolov were killed, and Mandzhukov cooperated with the Gemidzhii but in Bulgaria. He did not return to Macedonia. The Gemidzhii who were well-aware of the situation in Macedonia acted accordingly.

Widely humane in nature, Gotse Delchev appreciated everyone whom he believed was sincere in assisting the struggle for Macedonia's liberation. He saw the Gemidzhii as contributing factors in the general effort to achieve "the great goal". So he treated them with love and respect. We should mention here that, from a general point of view, Delchev expected Macedonia to be liberated when the internal political and material conditions were right and when the people were ready to rise. He saw the Gemidzhii as a contributing factor under these conditions and did not try to exclude them from the struggle. On the contrary.



Everyone who wrote about the Solun assassins, for understandable reasons, tried to find arguments to explain and “justify” the Gemidzhii contribution. In that they regularly mention Gotse’s attitude towards them, saying: “Gotse helped them... Gotse encouraged them... Gotse understood them...” etc. The same thing was said by the two surviving Gemidzhii, P. Shatev and T. Organdzhiev, in their memoirs. But even though B. Sarafov supplied the Gemidzhii with a considerable amount of material help, he did not make as much of an impression as Gotse did. The reason for this lies in the fact that all those who understood the problems associated with the liberation struggle and with the relationship between the Supreme Committee and the MRO, knew that Sarafov was prepared to help anyone who would “do something” against the Ottomans in Macedonia. Sarafov did this without taking into consideration what consequences this would have for the people and for the Organization. All Sarafov cared for was to do something violent in Macedonia. To shoot, to kill, to blow up things... to make a lot of noise so that it could be heard in Bulgaria and Europe.

Here is what Shatev himself had to say about Delchev and his relationship with the Gemidzhii and their work:

“He (Gotse) fully adopted, supported and approved this kind of struggle (diversionary actions) because, primarily, it was against an early general uprising. An early uprising at that time when the Europeans were not ready to support one would not have yielded positive results. On the contrary, an early uprising would have torn apart the IMRO even more, and would not have prompted any kind of Great Power intervention. Gotse knew that. But, at the same time, with his true view of things, Gotse Delchev also foresaw a need to act and not just sit there. More than organizing and arming the population was needed. Gotse believed that by taking a series of systematic actions it would keep the Ottoman government in a tense situation. Eventually it would exhaust it. But care had to be taken so as not to severely impact domestic and foreign policy especially those of the Great Powers. Another means of this struggle was to intimidate the European capitalists who were engaged in Macedonia and Odrin by taking regular actions against the railroads, bridges and their trade facilities. This was not just an idea, or just Gotse

Delchev's idea, it was an expression of everyone's wishes and aspirations in IMRO..." (P. Shatev, 299-300.)

Authors need to closely link Gotse Delchev with the Gemidzhii and their actions especially when they write about the terrible consequences associated with the Solun assassinations. They want to prove that the "culprits" of creating the terrible situation in Macedonia and with the MRO after the Solun assassinations were not just the Gemidzhii but also the first person (Delchev) leading the MRO who helped the Gemidzhii and who approved their actions.

After all Delchev did help the Gemidzhii with their last preparations. The Gemidzhii ran out of money and they needed support for months. They also needed more dynamite but could no longer seek help from Sarafov. At that time (in the fall of 1902) Sarafov found himself abroad and without money. He telegraphed Mechev to send him 25 napoleons and promised that he would pay him back double the amount after he returned to Sofia. After some hesitation, the Gemidzhii decided to send Sarafov the money by draining their precious reserves. Mechev and Shatev went to the post office to do the job, however, Mechev who was famous among his comrades for his good housekeeping and austerity, counted the money ten times before surrendering it to the post office. He did not want to make a mistake, he said. He went to the post office three times before he finally surrendered the money. He did not want to part with it and kept making excuses for giving it away. This money belonged to the people and being the way he was, characterized by his high morals and revolutionary qualities, he could not easily give it up, even for Sarafov, to whom the Gemidzhii were indebted. Mechev truly believed that once the money left his hands (which were considered as a kind of treasury by the circle) he would never see it again, especially when it was needed the most. They did send Sarafov the money but Mechev could hardly reconcile himself. He fretted for about an hour after they left the post office.

Left without sufficient funds, the Gemidzhii turned to Delchev for help. Delchev told them that he would give them a lot of money if they promised not to rush their actions. The money would come from MRO's Representative Office.

At that time Delchev and Petrov were no longer delegates of the Organization in Bulgaria. They were replaced by Tushe Delivanov and Dimitar Stefanov. After becoming leader of the MRO Central Committee, Garvanov would not allow authoritative people like Delchev and Petrov, who not only represented the Organization, but at that moment in time were in charge of the functions of the true Central Committee which had been arrested by the Ottomans. Delchev and Petrov's replacements, Delivanov and Stefanov, had neither the experience nor the authority of their predecessors. But Delivanov, a longtime friend of Delchev, and Stefanov always worked under Delchev's influence and at Delchev's request gave the Gemidzhii 250 liras (obtained as ransom from the kidnapping of Miss Stone). For receiving this money the Gemidzhii were obligated to take no action for the next eight months. This was because the Organization was expecting to import a large quantity of rifles purchased from Greece, which were to be delivered through Solun.

At the time when the Gemidzhii were given the money and told to hold their actions, it was unknown when the uprising was going to take place. We can assume that if the guns were not expected in Solun, the money given to the Gemidzhii would not have been conditional and the Gemidzhii could have carried out their action when they thought it was appropriate. However, even though they were not ready at the time, they would be ready when, in principle, it was decided to start the uprising. The only thing that was not known was the day the uprising was going to start. That is why pressure was put on them to wait and adjust to the needs and interests of the Organization. In the meantime they could fully prepare and be ready to realize their plans.

### **FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE SOLUN ATTACKS – ATTEMPTS TO DELAY**

The dynamite sent through Kochani and Veles arrived in Solun in February 1903. Given that the tunnel was already dug, the Gemidzhii decided to set aside an amount of dynamite necessary to blow up the bank. The rest was allocated for other purposes. Eleven cans filled with dynamite were placed under the bank's foundation. The fuse was connected to two cans and run through the tunnel all the way to the basement of the grocery store where it hung, waiting

to be lit. By the beginning of March 1903 the Gemidzhii were ready to blow up the Solun bank. Every day after that one of the Gemidzhii was present in the grocery basement monitoring the situation and, in the event of danger, ready to light the fuse.

During February and March 1903, most of the Gemidzhii were in Solun. Shatev and Mechev were also in Solun but illegally.

After fleeing Kratovo, P. Shatev could not return to Macedonia legally without being arrested. For some reason he was also illegal in Bulgaria. He stayed in Bulgaria for an entire year as an illegal immigrant without any documents. After sending the dynamite to Kochani he made plans to return to Solun but under a different name. Even if he wanted to get a passport under his own name he couldn't because he was not registered anywhere in Bulgaria and the authorities would not issue him a passport. But, with the help of a fellow Macedonian and friend he did get his passport. His friend Manasov, whose credentials Shatev used, was a teacher in Kiustendil. So, through friends and connections, Shatev managed to get a passport with Georgi Manasov's name and credentials but with his own picture and description. After receiving a visa from the Ottoman commissioner in mid-February, he arrived in Solun through Odrin. After that he was known to his friends and the authorities as Georgi Manasov, a name which, in a few months, would be found on the front pages of the European and world press.

Dimitar Mechev's arrival in Macedonia and in Solun was more complicated and riskier than that of Shatev. Knowing his "stinginess", his companions in Solun wrote to him and suggested that he buy new clothes, dress better and definitely travel in a second-class car. Mechev, unfortunately, did not buy the new clothes but did swallow "English salt" several times to upset his stomach and make himself look pale. He did not want to spend money on new clothes when he knew he was going to die soon. With very little camouflage, Mechev traveled through Skopje to Solun. His journey took him through Veles, his hometown, where a lot of people knew him and he was under a great risk of being discovered. For that reason his comrades in Solun took all sorts of measures to free him at the Solun railway station if he was caught by the police on the way. As it turned out, Mechev was traveling from

Skopje to Solun with the remains of the Russian Consul Grigori Shcherbin, who had been killed in Kosovska Mitrovitsa in March 1903. There was a large police presence at the Solun railway station as well as many senior civil servants and other consuls. Next to them were several Gemidzhii with dynamite and bombs in their pockets. It was a great temptation for them to start something, given the number of diplomatic representatives and civil servants gathered together in one place. This is what Kirkov said about this: “With only four Gemidzhii, each throwing a single bomb at the procession accompanying the body of the dead European and Ottoman consul, we could have done far greater damage than blasting the Bank and all the other acts involving dynamite. At that moment we regretted that Mechev was not arrested and that we were not given the opportunity to perform an unanticipated but highly tempting act.

We will never get another chance like this again...” said Kirkov with great pain in his soul. (Ibid, 333.)

Mechev arrived in Solun without any problems. In Skopje he was joined by Ismail Efendi, a translator from the Embassy in Skopje, who sat in the same car compartment as him. Ismail was also born in Veles and he knew Mechev. So in order to hide from Ismail, Mechev covered up part of his face, pretending to have a toothache. But to Ismail Efendi the man sitting next to him looked familiar and he suspected that it might be Mechev but refused to believe that a well-known “terrorist” from Veles would have the nerve to travel so freely in the Sultan’s train, let alone visit Veles where he was well known. He wouldn’t dare. At the same time Ismail did not have the nerve to speak to him. Ismail was one of those many people in the Ottoman state and in Europe who could not yet be convinced that there were people in Macedonia who were fanatically committed to liberating themselves and who were ready, at a moment’s notice, to sacrifice themselves for their homeland. Ismail calmly got off the train at the Veles station convinced that the man with whom he sat in the compartment could not be the well-known D. Mechev.

Towards the end of March 1903 the following Gemidzhii had gathered in Solun: Iordan Popiordanov-Ortse, Kosta Kirkov, Dimitar Mechev-Mecheto, Pavel Shatev (also known as Gorgi Manasov), Vlado Pingov, Ilia Trchkov, Georgi Bogdanov, Marko Boshnakov,

and the youngest in the circle Milan Arsov. It was a small group but big enough to attract the attention of the Ottoman police with their idleness in Solun. An official from the secret police named Panaiot Efendi, who in the past served in Veles, knew almost all the Veles Gemidzhii and frequently followed their movements on the Solun streets, wanting at all costs to know what these young men from Veles were up to in Solun. He was aware that they were not working or attending school so why were they still lingering in Solun? There were some who were saying that these boys were the sons of rich Veles parents, who were deliberately coming to Solun, beyond parental control, to devote themselves to the “easy” Solun life in the cafés and other entertainment localities. Having rich parents allowed them the luxury to spend a bit more carefree time, with no work, and if they did visit some stores and the like, they did it for company, conversation and entertainment, and not for any other reasons.

The image the Gemidzhii portrayed of themselves was successful and working for them. Both the police and the environment in which they circulated accepted them as such, and none of the relevant factors suspected them of doing anything more than “talking”. People thought of them as being “everything” except nobody thought or believed that they were dealing in conspiratorial activities. Even Panaiot Efendi believed that they were no more than playboys with nothing serious in their lives. Had the authorities looked a little deeper they would have discovered the truth. They would have discovered that these boys, spending time in all those café’s, were actually poor. They spent no money and could barely survive in Solun.

The Gemidzhii, however, were very careful not to cause suspicion among the authorities as they prepared to act. Their main goal was to blow up the Ottoman Bank, but they also had another very important goal: by their self-sacrifice to prove to Europe that this country could no longer tolerate slavery.

Preparations for blowing up the bank required the engagement of many people and assets. Keeping the grocery stocked and operational, digging the tunnel and acquiring the dynamite were not only risky tasks but required people, money and time. However, when all of this was done, the need for people was reduced to one

person to light the fuse and disappear without a trace and another person to board a ship. This person's life could truly be in danger. But the Gemidzhii did not care about "their own" lives and were prepared to die for their country. So, instead of fleeing, the Gemidzhii decided to use bombs to prove their point. About 70 to 80 primitive hand-made bombs were manufactured with the leftover dynamite and used for diversion on the ship. These bombs, which were triggered by igniting a fuse, did not have much effect in the open but were suitable for causing panic by their strong explosions. The Gemidzhii knew in advance that throwing these bombs in the streets of Solun against the army and police would not do much damage, except that they would create a panic in the city and the impression that people were being killed. If they wanted to kill people they would have manufactured iron bombs, the kind produced in the village Salbar workshop. They only had about ten of those bombs.

With the making of the bombs, all material preparations for acting were completed. The Gemidzhii in Veles expected that there would be a certain amount of dynamite left for them to "do something" in Veles and Skopje but there was none left for them.

The moment the Gemidzhii were ready to act, the question of "when to start the actions" was raised. It was obvious that they did not want to wait at all and wanted to light the fuse right away but they had promised MRO's Foreign Representative Office that they would wait. It was not difficult for them to have made that promise at the time because they were not yet ready but now when everything was ready they started to become impatient. They were constantly overwhelmed by a sense of fear that something would go wrong and that the many years of effort and preparations would fail. On the other hand, the dynamite was sitting under the bank's foundations in the soil and it was possible for moisture to get into it and render it inert. The Gemidzhii were constantly preoccupied with the uncertainty of what could happen tomorrow, so much so that it terrified them. Chatev admitted that they were constantly tense and nervous to a point where they could not even tolerate each other. "If we fail," Ortse often said, "we should drown in shame".

If we analyze the psychological condition in which members of the Gemidzhii circle were found after they completed all their

preparations, keeping in mind the fact that they were ready to die even if they had a chance to save themselves, we will find that they were impatient but determined to wait for the right time before they acted. Unfortunately something happened that was about to change all that. One day the communal authorities were called in to repair a sour line running over the tunnel that the Gemidzhii had dug. As the workers began to dig and repair the city sewerage network the Gemidzhii became quite agitated. Even though the tunnel they dug was deep and the ability to detect it was small, they became disturbed. News that came from abroad was even more disturbing. Some newspapers, such as *Le Temps* and *Die Zeit*, were broadcasting reports that the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was planning to attack various European companies in some of the larger Macedonian cities. Who was the source of this news being transmitted from Bulgaria was unknown. However, it alerted the Ottoman authorities to be even more vigilant. From that moment on, two weeks before the explosions, the Ottomans posted guards at the Ottoman Bank (Bank de Salonik), at the Austrian Post Office and at some other important buildings.

Watching the guards walking around the bank's perimeter made of Gemidzhii laugh. The poor fools were standing on top of the dynamite. The Ottoman police, especially in the bigger cities, became quite vigilant but in no case did it occur to them that the Bank could be mined from underground. According to news reported in the west, the authorities were anticipating attacks, but these attacks were expected to take place on the surface (as opposed to underground). Now that the authorities were alerted of imminent attacks, even in the big cities, the Gemidzhii were not sure how much the police already knew so they could not longer afford to wait. They decided to act... to perform the last act for which they had waited for so long...

First, a concrete and definitive plan had to be made. Ortse Popiordanov and K. Kirkov, who were most familiar with the city, worked on the plan. Their plan was approved during the group's meeting which also raised two important questions. One, whether to kill Hassan Fehmi-pasha, the Solun Vali and, two, whether to kill Ivan Garvanov, President of the MRO Central Committee? The proposal for killing the Vali was unanimously accepted - it was



decided that it would be done a few days after the explosions, because if it was done earlier it would cause raids, retaliation and arrests, during which some of the Gemidzhii would be killed. The task of killing the Vali was entrusted to Tsvetko Traikov in a suicide mission.

The proposal to eliminate Garvanov as retaliation for the loss of the 1,000 kg dynamite and for cutting short the possibility of expanding Gemidzhii actions in other Macedonian towns was declared useless because nothing could be achieved by it. The Gemidzhii figured that through their action in Solun it would make it impossible for the MRO Central Committee to exist in Solun anyway. The Gemidzhii also accepted the idea and promised to bring change to the MRO Central Committee composition to ideally include more active professional revolutionaries, and not just “officials and traders”.

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The Gemidzhii were ready to act mid-April but they did not want to start without first forewarning the MRO and even Garvanov himself.

At exactly the same time Damian Gruev was freed from prison and arrived in Solun. He was informed by the MRO Central Committee that a resolution to start the uprising had already been reached. He was also informed about Garvanov’s motives for making that decision. Garvanov’s goal, naturally, was to persuade Damian Gruev that he was right in making that decision and succeeded in doing so. Garvanov had done such a good job that when Delchev came to Solun to meet with Gruev about postponing the start of the uprising, he was not able to convince him. Gruev thought that it was too late for changing the plans. (Memoirs - D. Gruev..., 23.) Delchev left Solun dissatisfied just before the Gemidzhii started their actions, and a few days later was killed in Banitsa.

Gruev said nothing in his memoirs about his meeting with Dimitar Mechev. Mechev, as mentioned earlier, was well acquainted with Gruev and now, just before the Gemidzhii began their actions, he wanted to meet with him urgently. He wanted to let him know what the Gemidzhii were preparing and that they were against an early uprising. Mechev did meet with Gruev at the “Vardar” hotel where

Gruev had taken residence and openly told him that the Gemidzhii circle was against a mass uprising, because he thought that it could not be organized well under the given conditions, and it would result in damaging not only the movement but also the general population. Mechev warned Gruev that the people were not armed, and that the rifles expected to come from Greece through Solun had not yet arrived. In short, Mechev told Gruev that the MRO was not ready to rise and lead a mass uprising. According to Garvanov, however, Gruev was convinced that 1,000 rifles were on their way and would arrive in Solun, and that Delchev had to calm him down encouraging him that the necessary arms would be found in time.

Mechev had also told Delchev the same thing. “That is why I am telling you, as I told Delchev,” said Mechev to Gruev, “we are determined to carry out our plan at all costs. Let our actions and other similar actions, carried out in the cities and against the railroads throughout Macedonia, keep the Ottoman government in constant tension, gradually exhausting its moral and material strength. These acts will also demonstrate to what extent the Great Powers will be ready and prepared to take the initiative for an intervention. At the same time the population will harden its revolutionary spirit without being exposed to great dangers.” (S. Simeonov, 14-15, P. Shatev, 342-343.)

The arguments that Gruev heard from Mechev were far more realistic and more convincing than those he had heard from Garvanov. These “arguments” made by Mechev were also the same arguments made by Delchev, Petrov and the “many other and more aware members of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization”. (S. Simeonov, 15.) Gruev, however, had reconciled with the idea that the uprising would be taking place as planned here in Solun and decided to act on it. He then demanded that the Gemidzhii postpone their actions until after the uprising. This way they would be able to deliver a final blow to Europe. We don’t know if Gruev talked with Delchev about what to do with the Gemidzhii and their plans. After Delchev left Solun (he was there as an illegal), Gruev left for Bitola. From Bitola he went to his native village Smilevo and attended the Bitola Revolutionary District Congress.

Ortse officially notified Garvanov about the upcoming planned Gemidzhii actions. Here is how Hristo Kotsev, a witness to this event, described the scene:

“We were gathered (at the gymnasium) together one bright Saturday in order to discuss current events and exchange thoughts. Suddenly Garvanov’s assistant barged in and told Garvanov that an unknown person was looking for him. Garvanov went out and a little later came back. He told us that the unknown person was Ortse, leader of the anarchists, who came to tell him that the Gemidzhii had decided to act immediately. He tried to convince them that their actions would damage the movement. He told them that the Internal Organization had already decided to start an uprising in the summer. He also told them that the anarchist actions would be useless if the uprising did not succeed... But all the arguments made were in vain...”

“Did you happen to run out of money and you don’t want to tell me?” Garvanov asked Ortse, pretending that he did not pay serious attention to what Ortse had to say.

“Not at all! I came here to tell you something very serious. I came to tell you that we will start our actions immediately and to warn you to take necessary measures to protect yourself from the danger...” replied Ortse proudly and showed him a bomb that he had in his pocket.

Still not taking him seriously, Garvanov took out a dozen liras from his pocket and gave them to him. Ortse took the money and left.

“In the afternoon, one of the boys who hung around with them (Gemidzhii) came over and told us that these ‘crazy people’ had decided to act the next day. They decided to throw bombs on the train from Tsari Grad, which was arriving at the train station Sunday evening. In any case, to be safe, we collected all the materials from the archives and all the press materials in our possession and buried them in the gymnasium courtyard.” (H. Kotsev, *Prelude to Ilinden*, July 20, 1903 - *Ilinden Sbonik 1903-1922*, Sofia 1922, 48.)

Some of the information provided by Hristo Kotsev about the Gemidzhii, we can say without reservation, is incorrect. He claims that the 7 or 8 souls (Gemidzhii) were Sarafov's people whom Sarafov had sent to Solun to prepare for these actions with prior MRO Central Committee permission. He claims that the Central Committee was responsible for them and gave them 50 liras per month. They were given six months to prepare and when they were ready they simply betrayed the Central Committee. Then, when Kotsev figured out that he had been lied to about the relationship between the Gemidzhii and the MRO, he began to blame the Gemidzhii for wanting to start the uprising early, which was also not true.

Gotse Delchev was categorically against the Gemidzhii acting independently. He considered them an integral part of the revolutionary movement and helped them precisely because of that. Delchev did not believe that those young and courageous revolutionaries would do something that would be against the interests of the MRO. Delchev considered them and their preparations as part of the general preparations for the demolition of Ottoman power in Macedonia and accordingly expected their actions to be in harmony with those of the Organization. Delchev's contemporaries unambiguously confirm these views in their memoirs.

In the middle of January 1903, Delchev invited A. Kiprov, a close associate of the Gemidzhii, to the hotel "Batemberg" in Sofia and told him:

"You will come with me. We will not do madness. Whatever we do, we will do together. We should not deviate from the general plan..."

In a discussion regarding the pros and cons of having a mass uprising involving most of the population, Kiprov told Delchev that what the Organization could accomplish with many human casualties could be achieved more effectively with less casualties. Kiprov, in fact, developed the same uprising theory advocated by the Gemidzhii. Kiprov and Delchev had a long discussion about this, but when Delchev saw that he was not getting through to Kiprov he began to nervously pace in the room. Delchev then told Kiprov:

“Good! Do what you like. But tell your friends that they are driving me crazy.”

After talking to Delchev, Kiprovo went to see Sarafov, who at that time was hiding in Sofia and was preparing a unit to leave for Macedonia. Kiprovo also ran into Ortse and told him about the conversation he had had with Delchev. Sarafov’s advice to Kiprovo was to “act and destroy regardless of time and space”.

“One cannot carry out a revolution by being prudent,” said Sarafov. “We have to fight against Ottoman tyranny by all possible means.” (Alexander Kiprovo, *Signal of the Revolution – II. Ilinden*, III, 24, Sofia, 1930.)

Explaining Delchev’s position regarding the Gemidzhii and their actions, Kiprovo, among other things, wrote: “Delchev was sympathetic to our ideas, but would not deviate from the MRO’s general principles. He was always in opposition and looked for ways to ‘rein’ us in. But, at the same time, we were all his best friends. He loved Ortse, the hero of the Solun assassin...” (Ibid, 5.)

Delchev also met with Mechev in the same hotel, before he left Solun, however, he could not convince him to work with him and not independently.

There are some indications that would make us think that Delchev, when he met with Gruev in Solun, also met with the Gemidzhii. However, it is more probable that the Gemidzhii, being ready to start their actions, did not have the opportunity to meet with Delchev. After all, they were well aware of Delchev’s attitude and their eventual meeting could not have influenced anything. But, even though Delchev sympathized with their actions, he was a revolutionary very much conscious of all actions in the broader sense, and everything he did, he did in accordance with the revolutionary plan and in the interest of the people and the Organization. There was no need for Delchev to convince the Gemidzhii that the Organization was not yet ready to lead the people into a general uprising. He knew that better than them. But, at the same time, he did not believe that the Gemidzhii, through a small

number of isolated actions using dynamite, could yield important results and through them the people would be spared the terror and murders committed by the authorities.

Delchev and Petrov who opposed the “insufficiently prepared” general uprising, developed another theory: a “permanent (continuous) uprising”. They did their best and used their influence to reject the idea of a “classical” proclamation of an uprising in favour of continually attacking and terrorizing the Ottoman administrative authorities and institutions. This, they believed, under the current circumstances, was the most effective way of acting. Delchev advocated for launching parallel attacks. “While MRO’s armed units attacked the Ottoman army, the Gemidzhii would attack railway lines and state institutions...” But he had not forgotten to point out that this should always have been done away from the Christian population, in order not to subject it to persecution and cruelty from the authorities. “This is what Delchev preached,” wrote P. Iavorov, “because he was guided by the love of his people through every moment in his tumultuous life. He wanted the Macedonian population to live free more than he wanted Macedonia to be freed. Delchev was not prepared to sacrifice dozens of thousands of souls even if they belonged to proven Ottoman spies...” (P. K. Iavorov, Gotse Delchev, Sofia 1942, 74.)

Delchev worked tirelessly to organize the population and to prepare it for the uprising. In fact he was preparing the population to prepare itself for making great sacrifices. However, he was decisive against unnecessary and innocent victims. He accepted the use of terrorism but as a means within the liberation struggle, which had its place in space and time. That is why he did not agree with the Gemidzhii carrying out their action at a time when the Organization was not ready. He was aware of the harsh consequences of this and, it would appear, the Gemidzhii did not think about what would happen to them.

## **THE SOLUN ASSASSINS**

In the long preparatory period for the uprising, filled with frequent clashes with the authorities, the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization did not use dynamite, assassinations, or any other

diversionary measures in the cities or on the transportation lines. These measures were very complex and risky and required capable and dedicated staff for their successful execution, which the Organization did not have. These actions began to appear in the beginning of 1903. They were first carried out by Supremacist units and those of Boris Sarafov.

On January 15, 1903 an attempt was made to derail the Solun to Dede Agach train. Another train was also attacked the same day and close to the same place (near Poroi station). The telegraph line running along the railway line was attacked in two places in the same area and a long stretch of it was torn out. The same region also witnessed similar diversionary attacks in the last ten days of March 1903. All of these diversions were carried out by the famous bandit Aleko from Dolni Poroi, who was in the service of Colonel Tsonchev of the Supreme Committee. (Krste Bitoski, *Diplomatic Vigil for the Ilinden Uprising*, Skopje 1983, 101-103.) These attacks were carried out without consequences.

Supplied and ordered by Boris Sarafov, A. Kiprov formed a special unit tasked to blow up the express train in Odrin Region. However, since there had already been an unsuccessful attempt to blow up the railroad, the Ottoman authorities began to pay special attention to its security. In addition to that, Kiprov, in March 1903, dynamited a railway bridge on the Tsari Grad – Vienna railway line near the Bulgarian border. (A. Kiprov, *Ts. Illustration Ilinden*.)

The first successful diversionary action carried out in Macedonia was not carried out by the Solun Gemidzhii, but by Gotse Delchev. Between March 31 and April 7, 1903 Gotse Delchev demolished the great railway bridge at Angista (Seres Region) and the nearby tunnel. This was the first major action taken against the Ottoman authorities and against the European capitalists within the framework of the Macedonian liberation struggle in the pre-Ilinden period. Delchev was satisfied with the results. Here is what he wrote to Iavorov: “We destroyed the Angista railway bridge and the tunnel close to it. We dug out the train tracks in one place and destroyed the telegraph wires in two places. Everything was done so successfully that even the best military engineers would envy us. There are no Ottoman movements so far. When you write in the

newspaper about what was done, do not credit my unit. Just attribute the demolition to the general Ortses located throughout the whole country under the name Secret Revolutionary Organization. (Hristo Andonov-Polianski, Gotse Delchev - Prepiska, Skopje 1972, 178.)

And indeed in the article regarding the “Angista incident” published on April 7, 1903, in the newspaper “Freedom or Death”, edited by Javopov, it was written: “Angista is the beginning of the Ottoman fate in our struggles. Let the Sultan know this, let the whole world know this... Angista is the work of the Secret Revolutionary Organization.” (Ibid.)

Delchev stayed with his unit in this region for a week and then left alone for Solun to meet with Damian Gruev and with the Central Committee to discuss the uprising. He was planning to stay in Solun for ten days but left the city just before the Gemidzhii began their actions. This would be Delchev’s last visit of this great city.

Actions in Macedonia began to take shape often and were getting more serious with time. These were the kind of actions never witnessed by the wider public in the near past, especially in Europe. The Macedonian people’s suffering under Ottoman rule was a “normal” phenomenon and more and more was written about it. However, the saddest part about all this was that more attention was given to European and foreign interests than to the Macedonians who were suffering. Diplomatic preventatives in Tsari Grad and Macedonia were often telegraphically reporting to their governments in great detail about what was going on.

The Austro-Hungarian government, taking into consideration the serious diversion carried out at Angista, instructed Count Forgach, its representative in Sofia, to warn the Bulgarian government that it would be held liable if any further damage of the same kind was inflicted on the property of any Austrian company in Macedonia. (Institute of National History (INI), f. 424 / 178-179 - Elliot to the Marxist Lansdowne, No. 66, Sofia, April 8, 1903.) Of course, the Bulgarian government had nothing to do with what Delchev did or with what the Gemidzhii were about to do. However, assuming the Supreme Committee had organized these actions against the Ottomans in Macedonia, which the Bulgarians considered to be



Bulgarian territory, the Great Powers often blamed the Bulgarian government for acts committed by the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, which had nothing to do with the Bulgarian government. It is true that the MRO used Bulgarian territory to acquire arms and other needs, and the Bulgarian government often made serious attempts to prevent it but did not always succeed, but the MRO was never part any Bulgarian plans in Macedonia.

All these actions were new for the Ottomans but in no case did they allude to the Solun events. We will later see that some of the Great Power consuls in Solun wondered why the Ottoman authorities failed to suspect or discover that major events were being prepared in the city. Early in April 1903, twenty days before the Gemidzhii began their actions, Evgeniadis, the Greek consul in Solun, informed the foreign minister in Athens about the rumours being spread in Solun of riots starting later that month. The riots were expected to begin on April 19, 1903, Easter day.

“Rumours are being spread,” wrote the Greek consul, “in Solun that the ‘Bulgarians will commit crimes by using dynamite.’ They will attack churches and night processions during the Easter holidays, as well as other public institutions, in order to create panic and give the impression that the Ottoman government cannot provide security and that they will become the lords of the country.”

These rumours were so persistently spread that some Jews, Italian subjects, turned to the Italian Consul General demanding protection. The English General Consul, who was also informed about the “bad news”, turned to the Solun Vali begging him to take military measures to protect the city from such possible attacks.

At that time the Ottoman Solun garrison was shorthanded because most of the soldiers had been sent to Kosovska Mitrovitsa to suppress an Albanian rebellion. The Solun Vali also received orders from Tsari Grad to take extraordinary measures to protect the city from revolutionary threats.

Pisi, the merciful, French Catholic sister, who at the time worked in the French hospital in Solun and was in contact with the Macedonian people who she knew lived under terrible conditions,

wrote the following in her diary: “How long will this go on? Has it not overfilled the glass of bitterness? And if it has, how will it end when these unfortunate people get caught in a showdown with an empire? There are voices being heard saying the day of reckoning will be May 9<sup>th</sup> (1903) when the poor Macedonian people are pitted against the Ottoman Empire. Assassinations are planned for that day with the use of dynamite bombs at different points in cities and railways. Among others, the first place to attack will be Solun... Oh, my God! How will this endeavour, equal to suicide, come to an end?” (Ioanis Notaris, *Ta gegonota tis Thesalonikis ton Aprilio tu 1903 me vasi eggrafa tu istoriku arhiu tu Elliniku ipurgiu exoterikon - Makedonika*, X, en Solun 1970, 57-58; Slavko Dimevski, the Solun Assassins. From the Diary of a Merciful Sister “Nova Makedonija”, January 9, 1961.)

The rumours were taken very seriously by the Turkish authorities. The Solun military commander diverted three battalions (2,400 soldiers) destined from Smirna to Albania to go to Solun. The English Consul Beloit contacted the English Ambassador in Tsari Grad and asked him, if possible, to send the warships stationed in Volos and elsewhere to Solun to protect the city from possible disturbances. (*Makedonika*, 57-58.)

However, not everyone believed the rumours. Even Evgeniadis, the Greek Consul, himself did not believe the rumours. He believed that they had been deliberately spread to “terrorize” Solun as well as all of Macedonia.

Given the circumstances in Macedonia at the time, we don’t believe it was the Macedonians who were spreading these rumours. The least interested in spreading such rumours were the Gemidzhii who were most familiar with such pending actions. Given how the situation had intensified in Solun it would have been detrimental to their plans to spread such rumours. It seems that the rumours surfaced in Solun spontaneously with Delchev’s diversionary actions carried out at Angista. These rumours emerged just after the dynamite diversions in Angista took place. The news that revolutionary attacks would be carried out with dynamite could also be linked to the dynamite used in Angista. This kind of diversion, as we mentioned earlier, was the first in Macedonia and had a strong

and unusual effect, both with the Ottoman authorities and with those who learned about it. The special measures taken by the Solun Vilayet Authority for protecting the railway lines were related to the Angista incident. (Ibid, 58.)

The extra military and police measures taken in Solun proved unnecessary. The Easter holidays passed without any incident and the city continued with its normal life. At this time, the Gemidzhii were completing their final preparations for action.

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In addition to dynamiting the Ottoman bank, the Gemidzhii decided to also damage and perhaps sink a European ship. There were many European ships visiting the port of Solun every day so it was a question of whose ship to attack. After some discussion they decided to attack a French ship. That choice was based on the assumption that France had the highest economic interests in the Ottoman state and the destruction of a French ship would definitely get the attention of the others. The Gemidzhii partly blamed the political and economic problems and the uncertainty that ruled in Macedonia on foreign meddling, which they saw as an obstacle to the Macedonian people obtaining their rights. In their minds, exploitation of Macedonia by the wealthy Europeans, particularly by the French capitalists, was holding Macedonia back. The French government was very keen in introducing reforms in Macedonia but these reforms were not designed to contribute to the liberation of the conquered Macedonian population, they were introduced to frustrate a general uprising. This is why the Gemidzhii thought that dynamiting a French ship would get a lot more attention than dynamiting any ship. Based on historic French democratic tradition and progressive opinion, the Gemidzhii were certain that their actions would have greater understanding in France than in any other Great Power country, even if they were targeting French property!!

The Gemidzhii also did some consultations regarding this issue. Here is what Shatev had to say: “Before leaving for Macedonia, while we were in Sofia, Mechev and I visited a Macedonian man familiar with European diplomacy and asked him to tell us what he

thought of our plan in general. He responded positively. He also said that: ‘That part of Europe (the European part of the Ottoman Empire) is a sick place made sick by the European capitalists’. We asked him which would be the best country to harm. After describing the mood of the European countries, he said the countries that had interfered in our (Macedonian) affairs the most were Russia and Austria. They were interested in Macedonia the most. If their investments were affected, however, they would do nothing because they didn’t intend to change things in Macedonia. He pointed out, for example, the killing of the Russian consuls. Russia could have used these reasons to act in any way it wanted, even carry out reforms. But it didn’t. It’s the same with Austria. That is why he recommended that we attack the interests of the others, except for English interests. The English, even though they were strong, they were alone, without allies, and therefore would not start something. That left us with France, Italy, little Belgium and the others. We thought that France could instigate and encourage Russia to act. So we decided to attack a French ship. Regarding France, our advisor wanted to tell me not to touch France either...” (P. Shatev, *The Solun assassin*, 35-36.)

While looking for a French ship to attack, the Gemidzhii found out that the steamer the “Guadalquivir” was due to arrive in Solun on April 27, 1903 and leave the next day. This ship belonged to the “Massager Maritim Company”. It carried about 2,500 tons of cargo and traveled the line Marseille-Solun-Tsari Grad.

The Gemidzhii decided to attack the ship on April 28, 1903. A plan was drawn up and finalized during a meeting held outside the city. The following were decided: sink the French ship; mine the railroad near Solun station; ignite the gas tank used for providing light to the city; blow up the bank; burn down “Boshnak” Inn; and start street fights with bombs and revolvers. Interruption of the lighting system and throwing the city into darkness was the signal to start the other actions.

Roles were divided and everyone knew exactly what their task was in the specified time during the actions. P. Shatev’s (Georgi Manasov) task was to attack the French steamer.

As pointed out many times, the Gemidzhii did not expect or want to survive and were willing and prepared to die for their cause. Now, however, when the time came to act, the question rose whether it was wise to die at any cost or avoid being killed to live and fight another day. Determined to attack the first city in Macedonia, an attack that could have incalculable consequences for all of Macedonia, the Gemidzhii questioned whether they had the right to survive and continue their work or, according to their ideology, were they obliged to perish while performing their first task. It was a serious moral issue that yielded no consensus. Some thought that their work should continue and, therefore, it would be useful to save themselves if possible. This was the attitude taken and defended by Shatev, Boshnakov, Arsov and Bogdanov. Ortse, Kirkov, Mechev and others, however, were uncompromising in their demands to immediately sacrifice themselves...

“We will fight and we will perish...” was the attitude taken and defended by Ortse, Kirkov, Mechev and the others.

“They,” wrote Hristo Silianov, “could not see themselves in the struggle, except in connection with a brazen gesture of suicide. To stay alive meant to obscure the magnitude of their work and their own morale of being fighters who viewed death with contempt. They saw themselves as spreaders of death and horror in unprecedented proportions, without looking down. And what would remain of their pride if they accidentally fell into enemy hands? The success of what they started depended on their absolute will to die... (Silianov, 255)

The main reason why Ortse, Kosta, Mecheto, Ilia and Vlado insisted on sacrificing themselves, at all costs, was that they thought that with their death they would attract more fighters willing to fight for the freedom of their homeland and that they would follow in their footsteps by demolishing structures and killing hostile soldiers in the streets of Solun with dynamite and bombs. On the other hand, they were afraid that their actions would be unsuccessful if, while performing them, they thought of saving their lives.

“Before we put our plans into action this is how we thought,” wrote Shatev. “Some of us thought that if we all died there would be no

one to continue with our work. Some of us thought that it would be beneficial to our work if we survived and remained alive after performing our task so that we could do more. I, Milan Arsov and Boshnakov were of that opinion. Mechev, Kirkov and Ortse, on the other hand, were of the opinion that we were obliged to end our lives with our tasks. We proposed that we don't do everything at once. Do our tasks gradually, one by one, and blow up the bank last. The whole idea was to bring uncertainty to the unscrupulous European capitalists. Mechev and his friends were of the opinion that nothing could guarantee our survival after our first attempt. We could all be caught and put in jail and besides, we had no dynamite to continue with our work. Therefore, it was strongly suggested that we not take measures to escape and that we should die while performing our tasks. And that's exactly what some of us did. I, however, did not agree with that; I was against dying. The others, unfortunately, wanted to create a very powerful effect. I could not dissuade them from doing that..." (P. Shatev, 53.)

Everything was ready as they waited for the ship to arrive. The Gemidzhii spent the last days of their lives walking through the new "Pergite" court and talking about their mission and the effects it would have if completed successfully.

At that time, while in Veles, Todor Organdzhiev received a telegram from Solun in which it said: "Send all the money you have, Shurkov went broke." Organdzhiev sold all the rice in which he had transported the dynamite from Kochani and telegraphically sent all the money to Solun. He then received a new telegram from Solun in which it said: "Shurkov went bankrupt, take the money back." (T. Organdzhiev, 122.)

This was about 3 to 4 days before the Gemidzhii began their actions. After years of preparation the Gemidzhii, for the first time, were sure their plans would come to fruition and would not need any more money.

Shatev wanted to engage himself with the most urgent task first, but it had to also be a task that offered him a chance to save himself if he wanted to stay alive. Of all the Gemidzhii, Shatev was the most qualified to destroy the "Guadalquivir" (French ship). He had a

passport that showed him as a “foreigner” who, accordingly, could legally board the ship. He also spoke French which could be of benefit to him.

The “Guadalquivir” arrived in Solun the same day that it was expected with only a few hours of delay. The next day Shatev, as Georgi Manasov, arrived at the docks in a horse drawn wagon with a suitcase in his hand. Among other things in it he was also carrying a number of nicely wrapped, disguised gift packages in which he had hid the dynamite. A fuse was added to one of those packages so that it could easily and quickly be lit with a cigarette in the event that it was discovered.

After examining his passport and registering him as a passenger, Manasov’s suitcase was sent to the customs office. He decided to carry it himself fearing that a crewman might find his suitcase a little too heavy. The suitcase was examined superficially and very quickly because departure time was nearing. Shatev, as Manasov, was now on deck. All of the Gemidzhii, except for Ortse who was on duty at the grocery storehouse, sat near the harbour cafeteria waving goodbye, for the last time, and preparing to witness the beginning of their actions.

On board Shatev was placed in a second-class cabin just above water level. Unfortunately an explosion at this level would only damage the ship and not necessarily sink it. Shatev’s mission, however, was to destroy the ship and sink it. There was no time for thinking. The ship set off and began to increase its speed. Shatev had orders to blow it up as close to the port as possible. Shatev reorganized the dynamite and created a single slab from all the packages he had in his suitcase and prepared it for detonation. He wrapped it nicely, left it in his cabin and went off searching for an adequate place to detonate it. But no matter where he looked it was all above sea level. In other words, all he could do was damage the ship and not necessarily sink it. Shatev decided to look for a convenient place closer to the engine rook where the detonation would cause maximum damage. If he couldn’t sink it then why not burn it down. Then, when there was no one in the corridor and the ship had not yet left the harbour, Shatev lit the fuse. A strong

explosion was heard. The hull of the ship was slightly damaged but the engine room immediately caught fire.

There was panic on board. All the passengers were wondering what had happened. Frightened, they ran all over the place without knowing where they were going. The ship began to blow its whistle continuously, signaling that it was in danger and needed help. The passengers were told to assemble on deck. The ship's captain ordered the sailors to save the people and their luggage first. The other goods, including the cattle, were to remain behind. The lifeboats were lowered. Two military boats from the port arrived immediately. Other boats followed. All passengers and crew on deck were transferred to the rescue boats. The sailors then turned their effort to rescuing the few crew members who were trapped in the lower part of the ship and who were in danger of being burned. By then most of the ship was engulfed in flames. The passengers in the rescue boats, overwhelmed with a terrible fear, watched the burning ship and wondered what had happened. The prevailing opinion was that the fire was the result of spraying the ship's steam boilers with cold water.

The secretary of the French consulate arrived at the scene. A little later Steg, the French consul himself arrived at the scene. Thinking seriously about what may have caused the ship to catch fire the secretary concluded that it could not have been a result of spraying the ship's steam boilers with cold water. So the question on Steg's mind was "what really caused the fire?" It could not have been the boilers. If the fire was caused by a damaged boiler the flames would have appeared much later, an hour or two after the explosion took place, not together with the explosion. On closer examination they also found a hole in the ship's hull, which no doubt was created as a consequence of some kind of explosive.

"We don't know when they decided what the fire was caused by. That responsibility was transferred to the authorities. In the meantime the passengers being offloaded believed and spread the news that it was a boiler explosion.

All the passengers and crew abandoned the ship and headed towards the quay. The passengers were asked to report to the French



company's office where they took their names and were told to come back the next day to claim their luggage. Also in that luggage was my (Shatev) suitcase." (P. Shatev, Macedonia under slavery, 358-367.)

About five or six crew members were wounded during the explosion. They were taken to the French hospital. At the request of the French consul, all crew members were also accommodated at the hospital. With the exception of the chief mechanic, who was badly wounded, the wounded crew members quickly fell asleep. Unable to sleep the chief mechanic decided to tell his side of the story, of what had happened on the ship after the explosion. After the explosion took place, he said, many of the traveling merchants on board forgot about their precious cargoes and in panic jumped into the sea. Frantic, several women knelt in front of the captain begging him to save them. At first, the captain and the crew were in disarray but came together very quickly. Several sailors jumped in the water and pulled out the merchants who sought their salvation in the sea. Since the entire engine room was not destroyed, the mechanic managed to steer the ship to port. While doing this he constantly thought about what may have caused the explosion and increasingly came to believe that it may have been done intentionally, that the engine room was rigged to explode.

"Oh, my lord," wrote sister Pisi, "how can that be? Did the poor Macedonians do that? What did my countrymen do to provoke it?"

A huge crowd gathered on the quay and watched with great curiosity the light from the sea illuminating the city. This is what H. Kotsev saw and had to say about it: "On the Sunday night of April 27, 1903, a bomb blew up in the station and broke only a few glasses in the front wagons. The effect was terrible: everyone wondered and was perplexed as to who might have done this. The consuls and attachés ran to see what had happened but there was no one there to tell them and to satisfy their curiosity. (This diversion was carried out in the evening of April 28, 1903, the same day the 'Guadalquivir' was burnt down.)

During the evening of the next day the 'Guadalquivir' was in flames in the middle of the sea. At that time Garvanov, T. Lazarov and I

were sitting at ‘Nonio’s’ tavern drinking our beer, looking at each other and wondering how the ship had caught on fire in the middle of the sea and, with so much water all around it, how they were unable to extinguish it right away. A person had to have the heart of Nero to enjoy that sight, watching the burning steamer in the bay. All night and the next day until the evening Solun was illuminated so much so that the Sultan Hamid himself would have regretted that he had not had such a ‘donanda’ (festivity) in Tsari Grad on August 19, when he celebrated his coronation.

That second act (bombing of the ship) made everyone tremble: The Ottomans, the Jews, the Greeks, the Europeans... (Solun at that time was a big city.) All these people felt clamped down by the invisible hand hanging over the city, threatening to ignite it from all sides... The voices that told them the boiler had exploded... did not seem believable any more...” (H. Kotsev, 48-49.)

That same evening at 8 o’clock, while Shatev, under the name Georgi Manasov, was staying at the hotel “Parthenon”, he was visited by Mechev, Trchev and Arsov who had failed in their mission to destroy the Tsari Grad to Solun passenger train. They had placed dynamite at the corner between the big station outside of the city and the small station inside the city. They were supposed to set off the dynamite the moment the train appeared but, unfortunately, the locomotive had passed over the dynamite before the explosion took place. The dynamite did explode but did not do much damage. Also none of the passengers were hurt. The only thing the explosion did, wrote Kotsev, was cause excitement and fear in the city. Many began to believe that the “Guadalquivir” being ablaze was not an accident, but the work of coordinated actions committed by the revolutionary committees that existed everywhere in Macedonia. Many felt that the “committee” had now expanded their revolutionary activities to include Solun.

The police ordered all the hotel guests to stay put in the hotel and not leave the city before they were cleared by the police. Shatev found it very difficult to retrieve his passport from the hotel owner but, nonetheless, he convinced the owner to give it back to him.

Shatev, at this point, found himself in a serious dilemma. By this time the police had discovered that the explosion on the “Guadalquivir” was no accident and were looking for suspects. The names of all passengers who had boarded the ship were recorded and the police had a copy of them. Their names were also recorded by the shipping agency upon their return from the burning ship. So, it was not difficult to pick out anything that looked suspicious. The authorities were particularly suspicious of those who were traveling with Balkan country passports, especially those with a Bulgarian passport who were now looking to return to Bulgaria. (According to some sources (Makedonika) the deputy ship captain noticed Shatev loitering in the corridor. This was the time when Shatev was looking for a good place to set up the dynamite. Shatev himself admitted that a crew member was in the corridor and that he had to wait for him to leave so that he could safely light the dynamite fuse. It was alleged that the ship’s deputy captain provided the authorities with a fairly accurate sketch of the character (Shatev) loitering in the corridor. If Shatev was to be arrested, even on suspicion, it could easily jeopardize the other Gemidzhii by association. They too would be arrested, which in turn would ruin their plans. So it was risky to stay in the hotel because the arrival of the police was expected, but it was also risky to try and escape. Escaping, however, was the better option. Shatev’s main preoccupation was to prevent himself from being arrested before the Gemidzhii had a chance to carry out their actions, the majority of which were to begin on April 29, 1903. Shatev snuck out of the hotel and took a carriage to the train station. He dressed himself elegantly, in the latest European fashion, which enabled him to bypass most security obstacles and safely climb on board the train headed for Skopje.

By late evening the same day it became very clear to everyone that what had happened in Solun was a “big plot” organized by the passenger who fled the Parthenon hotel and did not report to the police. He was the person responsible for blowing up the “Guadalquivir”. Also, he was the only traveler who did not return to claim his suitcase from the “Masagheri Martin” company.

On Wednesday April 29, 1903, the Gemidzhii initiated their actions in Solun. When the French ship blew up, the day before around 11 am, many people in Solun thought it was an accident, a result of a

defect in the machinery, and they had nothing to worry about. Then there was the incident with the train which caused some anxiety, but very few people knew about it. But no one could have missed or ignored what happened on April 29, 1903. It was horrific and caused panic throughout the city.

According to their plan, all the Gemidzhii took their positions at the agreed time on Wednesday and began their actions. The first to act was Kirkov, the most vulnerable in the circle. Around 8:30 pm, using a few kilograms of dynamite, Kirkov set off an explosion and damaged the gas and water pipes going under a small bridge near the sea. Moments later the entire city sank into darkness and was left without water. This was the signal for all other actions to commence.

Minutes after the lights went out, Ortse, who at the time was manning the grocery store, lit the fuse in the basement. He then closed the grocery store window blinds and left for home, which was not far from the bank. There are three versions of the story to what actually happened after Ortse lit the fuse and the explosion took place. According to Simeonov (and Silianov), after lighting the fuse Ortse left the grocery store and ran up to the second floor of the bank where the director and his family resided, to warn them to immediately leave the building because it would explode in five minutes. From there he ran home to his own apartment which he rented from the Italian Antonio Pete, located behind the Catholic Church. (S. Simeonov, 17.)

According to another version of the story, while fleeing from the grocery store to his home, Ortse noticed the bank director entering the bank through the rear entrance. Ortse warned the director to leave immediately and save his family. (K. Tsrnushanov, 171. Where did the author find this information? Perhaps this sounded more plausible to him than what Simeonov had said and was accepted by Silianov?) Regardless of which version of the story is true, the director, at the last moment, left the bank and took his family to the Catholic mission near the bank. P. Shatev, however, wrote (P. Shatev, 386.) that the director had moved from the bank about a week before, fearing that something might happen.

This is what the merciful, French Catholic sister Pisi had written in her diary about the bank explosion: “The bank director’s family, which had miraculously survived the explosion and bank fire, came to us before dawn asking for shelter...” Then came the family of the French and a little later the family of the Austrian consuls. They were afraid that the terrorists were going to attack their consulates and they wanted their families to be safe in the hospital. (Slavko Dimevski, “Nova Makedonija”, January 10, 1961.)

Did Ortse, who did not care about saving his own life, really try to save the bank director and his family? And how could he do it when, as we pointed out earlier, the bank was guarded well by Ottoman guards? It is also unlikely that there was enough time from the moment he lit the fuse to the moment the explosion took place for Ortse to get out of the grocery store, hide from the guards, find the director and then have the director assemble his whole family and run away to safety. Or did the director and his family really move out of the bank earlier for safety reasons? If the family had moved out earlier, why then did it have to leave the new apartment and run off to the safety of the French hospital; not before the bank was blown up, not while the bank was burning, but before dawn after the Ottoman army had arrived when the bank was still burning and the soldiers could shoot at anything suspicious without warning? And, if the director had “another apartment” into which he had moved earlier, then why did his family not leave the French hospital and go home at the same time as the consuls’ families left the hospital and returned to their homes? Sister Pisi wrote in her diary that the director had no place to go because everything he had was burned down. We can argue about this story half a dozen different ways but it seems that Ortse in some way did manage to save the bank director’s family.

After the explosion the bank caught fire. Here is what sister Pisi wrote about this terrible and exciting event:

“...The dice were rolled and there was no turning back. After a blast in the distance the lights went out in the entire city. Suddenly there was a terrible explosion close by that disturbed the peace and a fire broke out at the Ottoman bank. The flames were licking the sky and illuminated our yard like it was daytime. It felt like hellfire. Luckily,

the French sailors who had been brought here the previous night grabbed the hoses... and started to put the fire out from our side. The danger of the fire lasted until 2 am. During that time the city was in a sorry state. Bombs were exploding on all sides of the city. Other institutions were also attacked...

During the blaze the sick and the wounded were horrified. They slipped out of bed and wanted to leave the hospital. Some were transferred to our monastery which was separated from the hospital by a patio yard... They were joined by the families of the consuls and the bank director.” (Ibid.)

Dimitar Mechev and Ilia Trchkov tried to jump a wall and get into the yard of the city lighting factory in order to blow up the reserve gas tank. Unfortunately they were discovered by the caretaker and had to flee before completing their task. From there they took a coach to the Austrian post office. Trchkov went inside, lit the fuse, put the dynamite package near the counter and left. One of the guards spotted the bomb and tried to toss it outside, but it exploded in his hands and blew him up in a “gruesome way”. (Archives of Macedonia (AM), F. 238, French Consulate in Solun - to Delcasse, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Solun, May 7, 1903.) From there the two went to their house, located near the “Tophane” barracks, locked all metal doors and windows and began to throw bombs onto the street from the rooms and the terrace. The army, which arrived almost immediately after the first explosions, responded to their bombs with rifle shots. At first it appeared that some soldiers ran away when the bombs were thrown at them but they quickly realized that the bombs dropped on them did not immediately explode. In other words, there was a short window (while the fuse was burning) between when the bomb was thrown and when it exploded. There was enough time to move away from the bomb after it was dropped. Under instructions from their commander the soldiers were ordered to lie down as willing targets and then, when the next bomb was thrown, shoot at the assailant. The shooting continued for a long time. According to some sources the battle lasted a few hours. Mechev and Trchkov threw more than 40 bombs and then they killed themselves with their own revolvers.

Immediately after the lights went out in Solun, Vladimir Pingov “the barber” went out and, using beret salt and a bottle of phosphoric acid, started a fire at the “Boshnak” Inn. After that he went to Mechev and Trchkov’s house. When he tried to cross through the “Tophane” main gate the guard stopped him and wanted to hold him as a suspect for no apparent reason. The guard was not aware of who Pingov was and what he had done. But, taking no chances, Pingov ignited a bomb and killed himself.

Many people then and now can’t explain why the Gemidzhii set fire to the “Boshnik” Inn. This particular inn was an important place for the Macedonian people to stay when they visited Solun. It did not belong to the European capitalists and there was no one to miss it except the visitors who stayed there.

After he was given the signal, Milan Arsov, the youngest of the Gemidzhii, threw a bomb at the “Alhambra” café. One waiter was killed. Realizing what was going on all around them, visitors to the café managed to escape the explosion before the bomb went off. (Makedonika, 76.) Of course the fuse young Arsov was using was long, which enabled the visitors to move away in good time.

Georgi Bogdanov threw a bomb into the café “Nonio” located on the quay square. He too used a long fuse and caused no casualties. After that both Arsov and Bogdanov took to the streets and continued to throw their bombs.

On April 29, 1903, during the second day after the Gemidzhii began their actions in Solun, the first of the Gemidzhii circle to fall victim were Dimitar Mechev, Ilia Trchkov and Vlado Pingov. They were all killed. Ortse Popiordanov, Kostadin Kirkov, Milan Arsov, Georgi Bogdanov, Marko Boshnakov and Tsvetko Traikov were still alive and went back to their homes.

As it turned out the Gemidzhii generally did well in putting their plans into action. Despite their dangerous assignments most of them were still alive. Milan Arsov, Georgi Bogdanov and Marko Boshnakov were still alive by choice because they did not surrender to the idea of perishing at any cost and thus far avoided enemy bullets and suicide. Ortse and Kosta, however, were expected to die.

Looking for a glorious way to die they extended their actions for two more days attacking the city, holding its residents hostage and driving the authorities mad.

And just as the city calmed down for a bit it was again shaken up by more explosions on April 30, 1903. Ortse barricaded himself in his own apartment which, as we said earlier, was located in the main part of the city near the Ottoman gardens and the French hospital. Moments after the first explosion both the police and the army arrived in the vicinity and Ortse wasted no time in pummeling them with bombs which he threw from his balcony. This uneven battle lasted for several hours. Then, after Ortse threw his last bomb, he went out on the balcony, pulled out his revolver, stood upright and shot himself. (According to Shatev and S. Simeonov, Ortse did not pull away to hide after he threw his last bomb allowing the soldiers to shoot him.) Upon his death the Ottoman soldiers ran up to defile Ortse's dead body but the military unit commander, known to some in Solun as Arab Bimbashi, stopped them. The commander was quite taken by Ortse's courage, heroism, patriotism, coolness and readiness to die for his country. He would not allow his soldiers to take out their frustration on the young revolutionary, showing him as an example of how it is to die for your fatherland.

Because Sister Pisi was in close proximity to the incident while it took place, her accounts are more reliable than those who heard about it from others at various different times. And here is what Solun looked like on April 30, 1903, according to Sister Pisi, the day Ortse lost his life:

“The Ottoman police had enforced maximum control over everyone. There were soldiers stationed at the exit of every street... The city was now in full siege. The shops were closed... The more prominent Ottoman families were being evacuated from the city. The train from Tsari Grad did not arrive that day... The Ottoman and foreign media were all rushing to catch the train to Tsari Grad.

After that Solun looked like a cemetery. At one o'clock in the afternoon, while we tried to rest a little from the sleepless night, we were again surprised by the explosion of more bombs followed by rifle fire in our immediate vicinity. Panic again engulfed the people



who were with us. This time we really believed that our house was being attacked. However, a little later, we realized that the soldiers were after a Macedonian man returning to the apartment in our immediate vicinity. They were after him wanting to arrest him. After going into the building, he started attacking the soldier from the balcony. After throwing 11 bombs, he pulled out a revolver and exclaimed: 'This is how a hero dies!' Then the unfortunate man killed himself." (S. Dimevski, "Nova Makedonija", January 10, 1961.)

When the Gemidzhii were making their plans of action they included killing the Solun Vali. This was to be done towards the end of their campaign, perhaps a few days after their last actions. Tsvetko Traikov was expected to hide and wait and then, when all the Gemidzhii were dead, to assassinate the Vali. He was to wait for the Vali to come out of his house, or out of the building where he worked and kill him. Traikov was then expected to shoot himself. That was the plan.

Tsvetko Traikov unfortunately had no patience for waiting. The same day Ortse had his last fight with the authorities, at about 5 to 6 o'clock that afternoon, Traikov was waiting for the Vali at "Pirgite", the new city court. He wanted to kill the Vali as he boarded the wagon to return home. Unfortunately Traikov was seen by the Vali's bodyguards. Realizing that he would not be able to carry out his task, he pulled back, lit a bomb and sat on it. A few seconds later his body was blown up in front of the surprised Vali and his entourage.

The last to remain alive was Kosta Kirkov. So, when and how did Kosta die? According to Shatev, Kosta allowed himself to be killed by Ottoman soldiers the same day Ortse died. But according to other sources, he died the next day. Handsomely dressed on the Friday morning of May 1, 1903, Kirkov, holding his head up high carrying a briefcase in his hand, left his home and headed for Sabri Pasha Street where the telegraph station was located. He headed there pretending to send a "telegram" but his real aim was to blow up the post office. He knew that all public institutions were vigilantly guarded by the authorities and he would not be able to enter the post office. But that was his mission and this is how he was expected to die.

Kirkov was stopped by the guard at the entrance of the post office. The guard was obliged to search him in accordance with his orders. Kirkov, understandably, could not allow the guard to search him because he was carrying explosives. Kirkov pulled back a little, took out a bomb from his pocket and tried to light the fuse. But with a quick jump the guard stopped him. Kirkov fulfilled his important task but not the way he wanted. He fell victim to the guard's bayonet and was instantly killed, unfortunately before he could blow up the post office.

According to another source (K. Tsrnushanov, 172.), Kirkov managed to light the fuse before he was stabbed and the bomb did explode killing two guards. But it seems that the most insanely spirited among the Gemidzhii died "most peacefully". He was the last to die but apart from the guards and the authorities that knew about this, the city was not informed about the actions and suicides that continued on May 1, 1903. Kirkov's aim was to inform the city that he died for his homeland and that was why he allowed the Ottoman guards to kill him but the statement he was trying to make was not reported.

There is no dilemma in general as to how Kirkov died. But there is some dilemma as to when he died. New documents have been discovered that put the above mentioned date into question. On May 4, 1903 in her diary, among other things, Sister Pisi wrote: "Today a young man pretending to carry a telegram went to the telegraphic bureau. When he was stopped in the middle of the stairs, he quickly hurled a bomb inside the building. But the guard stationed inside threw the bomb outside. When the bomb exploded it killed a guard and the assassin." (S. Dimevski, "Nova Makedonija", January 11, 1961.)

The Greek Consul was a little more specific when he wrote: "On Saturday the 'bandits' did not do anything, but the next day (May 3) at noon one of them tried to enter the telegraph station pretending to send a telegram, but he not only refused to allow himself to be searched, he protested. He was immediately killed by the soldiers. On him they found one bomb, two capsules of dynamite and a revolver. There are signs confirming that he was responsible for

damaging the gas carrier. This was the last attempt, but it cannot be argued that there are no other conspirators who would commit similar crimes. Moreover, it is known that the grocer, from whose shop the plot started, as well as another gang leader, have not yet been caught.” (Makedonika, 78-79.)

The Gemidzhii wanted their action to last as long as possible, in order to keep both the Ottomans and the Europeans in a tense situation so that many things could be exposed about Macedonia. That is why the Gemidzhii planned their actions as follows: first day – bomb the ship and the train station; second day – bomb the bank and carry out various attacks on the city; third day – more attacks (Ortse’s death). Those who did not have bombs and decided to stay alive just retreated and hid. It would appear that Kosta Kirkov decided to wait and strike after everyone thought the actions were over and that the perpetrators were liquidated. He wanted to make his own statement with his own bomb. He wanted to create new anxiety and, with his death, remind everyone that they had not seen the last of the Gemidzhii.

## **IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GEMIDZHII ACTIONS**

All diplomatic representatives in Solun reported the Solun events to their governments. Most concerned about the Gemidzhii actions were those who had the most to lose, such as the French Consul General and the Greek Consul General. For every revolutionary act in Macedonia, the Greek consul saw it as a deadly danger working against Greek “interests”. The diplomatic dispatches from Solun sent out on April 28, 29, and 30, 1903 were extensive and dealt mostly with the explosive situation in Solun. Unfortunately nowhere was there a mention of explosions on May 1, 1903. On April 30, 1903 Evgeniadis sent a telegram in which he stated that around 8 pm (April 29) about 20 bombs were thrown over cafés and other places in the Solun centre and on its periphery, causing a lot of panic. “Large crowds, well excited and in desperation, were running around on the streets. Bombs were thrown all over the place... a fire was started at the Ottoman bank. Casualties were minor because the bombs thrown at the cafés caused little damage. The army began to arrest people... At this moment, at midnight, there is a lot of

continuous shooting and bomb blasts on the outskirts of the city...  
The situation is serious...”

In his next telegram, again sent on April 30, 1903, Evgeniadis wrote: “The great panic continues... There are new bomb attacks tonight. I have information that the conspirators decided to blow up our Consulate tonight. I discussed with the city Vali how to overcome this danger. So far about 300 people have been arrested...” The telegram also stated that since Wednesday (after what happened on the evening of the 29) all kinds of bombings have taken place, but the house searches and arrests continue. “It was decided to kill anyone who resisted or tried to run away. Today I have been officially notified that 30 people have been killed. But according to unofficial information I have learned that one hundred and fifty people were killed yesterday and today. Starting at 6 o’clock in the evening all people have been locked up in their houses and movement in the streets has been forbidden.” (Ibid, 62-63.)

Similarly, telegrams were sent by other diplomats from Solun to their governments during this time also describing the events. Most of their descriptions were correct but there were also inaccurate descriptions. It is understandable that when the city was thrown into chaos, particularly by bombs and violence as the Gemidzhii did, no one knew exactly what was happening and the authorities were inclined to conceal or distort the truth by giving information which was often quite opposite to what was happening. The Greek consul for example, when referring to the Macedonian revolutionary movement and to any action that did not coincide with the wishes and aspirations of the Greek propaganda in Macedonia in general, could neither be and did not want to be objective. For him the Gemidzhii were, above all, a bunch of “Bulgarians” who loved Macedonia for themselves and, therefore, could be nothing more than criminals. So it’s no wonder that he stopped reporting on Gemidzhii actions after April 29, 1903, even though he heard bombs exploding on April 30. The bombs he heard exploding after April 29, 1903 he explained as the “perpetrators using bombs against the army to defend themselves and that they were caught or killed by the army.” So, according to him, even though the perpetrators were present, they were unable attack! But then, again according to him, they were “planning” to attack the Greek consulate!

It is interesting what the foreign consuls initially wrote to their superiors about the events in Solun, especially about the bombing of the Ottoman bank. None of the consuls knew or assumed that the bank attack was carried out from underground. This is what Di Revel, the Italian consul, wrote: “A wagon stopped at the door of the Ottoman bank from which people got off and were followed by others who, pretending they were arguing amongst themselves, killed the guard and two night watchmen. Because of the noise a patrol of 12 soldiers killed one of the conspirators, but the others, using the confusion as cover, entered the bank building and threw dynamite bombs in all directions. Three blasts were heard in the second part of the building, a wall collapsed on the neighbouring “Colombo” hotel and buried the German club called “Kegel Club”... Many of the conspirators remained buried in the bank building, others were killed or arrested.”

The diplomatic reports coming out of Solun, especially from the Greek consul, composed 7 to 10 days after the Solun events, were far more revealing and, of course, more accurate. We will talk about them a little later.

The actions perpetrated by the Gemidzhii with dynamite were as follows: bombed were the ship “Guadalquivir”, the Ottoman bank, the “Alhambra”, the “Nonio” and the “Boshnak” Inn. As was mentioned earlier, after Kirkov damaged the gas pipeline he returned to the city and threw a bomb in front of the Grand Hotel. The bomb exploded but did not cause any damage. Mechev also threw two bombs in front of the “Egypt” café. The German club was demolished and so were some houses.

Included among the Gemidzhii killed during these heroic events were Jordan Popiordanov-Ortse, Kosta Kirkov, Dimitar Mechev, Vladimir Pingov, Ilia Trchkov and Tsvetko Traikov.

Included among the Gemidzhii who survived the heroic events were Pavel Shatev, Georgi Bogdanov, Milan Arsov and Marko Boshnakov.

For as long as these “destructive incidents” lasted, the Macedonian people in Solun were outlawed de facto. This was true of all Macedonians, regardless of whether they belonged to the Exarchate or to the Patriarchate Church, or whether they were called “Bulgarians” or “Greeks”. However, the Exarchates were the first to find themselves in an extremely difficult situation. They were seen as the “revolutionaries” and therefore a “dangerous” element. As a result the authorities decided to use this occasion to drive them out of Solun by force. Steg and the other Great Power consuls feared that the same thing that had happened with the Armenians earlier could happen in Solun and in Macedonia in general.

In the struggle for their rights (Article 61 of the Berlin Agreement envisaged the implementation of reforms in Armenia, similar to Article 23 referring to Macedonia), in August 1896, Armenian revolutionaries, supporters of the Dashnak Committee, carrying 16 kg of dynamite in bags, entered the Ottoman bank in Tsari Grad, locked the door and occupied it. Through the bank director they then made demands of the Great Power MPs to initiate a reform project for the six Armenian vilayets, threatening that if they did not do it they would blow up the bank. As soon as the Armenian plot was discovered a crowd of Kurds and Lazis, armed with sticks and yataghans, attacked and slaughtered the Armenian population in Tsari Grad. So, instead of seeking reforms from the Sultan, lawmakers put their entire effort into stopping the immortal slaughter of Armenians. The Sultan promised that he would allow those Armenians who occupied the bank to leave the country safely. He fulfilled his promise. Unfortunately the slaughter continued. The government organized a fast-paced funeral service and took the corpses off the streets. A special group of people was put together to follow the crazed killers and pick up the killed and badly wounded victims. Their bodies were thrown into trash carts. Tens of thousands of Armenians were killed this way in the streets, in their homes and in their shops in Tsari Grad. More than 25,000 Armenians were killed in the Armenian vilayets.

The killers stopped their violence the day after the Sultan received a telegram with an ultimatum from the Great Power MPs. This proves that this genocide against the Armenian population was not a spontaneous act, but was organized by the bloody Sultan.

The European public was appalled by the ghastly cold-blooded act against the Armenian population. Protests against this criminal act turned into a movement that constantly reminded the people and the European statesmen that the Ottoman Sultanate was an anachronism in modern society and that if measures were not taken and if the oppressed were not helped in receiving their human and political rights, bloody events such as these would be repeated.

The Armenians had a strong echo in Europe, especially in the countries with democratic traditions, such as England and France. Then, seven years later, when similar incidents began to appear in Macedonia, such as the Solun assassinations and the Ilinden Uprising, much was written and spoken about the Armenians and their tragedy as if it had happened yesterday.

So naturally the question raised before the foreign consuls in Solun was: "Look what the Ottomans did to the poor Armenians who just threatened to blow up the bank? This, by the way, was the same bank Merdzhanov's group was supposed to mine. The Ottomans killed several tens of thousands of Armenians for just threatening to blow up the bank. So the question was: "What will the Ottomans do to the Macedonian people for the Gemidzhii ransacking Solun and beyond for 3 to 4 days?" The consuls were wondering the same thing when they went looking for the Solun Vali as soon as they figured out what was going on.

Steg, the French general consul, together with the general consuls of England and Italy, who lived close to each other, without taking the exploding bombs into consideration, began to look for the Ottoman Solun Vali in order to be more closely informed of the situation in the city and the measures the Ottoman authorities would take to restore peace in the city. The Vali met them on his way to the Ottoman bank and invited them into his car. On the way they were joined by the Austro-Hungarian general consul. The Vali promised the consuls that he would do everything in his power to protect the European citizens. In doing so, the consuls insisted that he promise them that he would not allow the Ottoman population to interfere with the introduction of order in the city. (A.M., F. 238, French Consulate in Solun - to Delkase, Solun, May 7, 1903.)

And even though the Vali promised the consuls he would do everything in his power, the massacres in Solun and Macedonia were not prevented. What happened to the Armenians also happened to the Macedonians, but on a smaller scale. The pogroms in Solun, while the Gemidzhii acted, were committed more by the soldiers and less by the Ottoman, European and Greek population. After the most intense Gemidzhii actions took place on Wednesday night, the Ottoman army and police, the next day, began to arrest the exarchates en masse. About 50 Albanian soldiers, armed only with daggers, were divided into 5 or 6 groups and led by fanatical Ottoman citizens. They ran around the streets on the pretext that they were helping the army round up the exarchates, broke into Macedonian houses, attacked the closed inns and café's in the "Vardar" settlement and plundered everything they found. These vigilantes arrested and killed anyone who they thought was "Bulgarian" or as such, pointed out by others. Many people from the Exarchate and other Christian populations in Solun were "slaughtered" that Thursday. (Makedonika, 65, 78. The Greek consul Evgeniadis saw the killing of "Bulgarians" in Solun as a normal thing, but was alarmed by the fact that "Greeks" were also killed. He was upset that the killers did not want to distinguish between the "types" of Christians and that they thought that all Christians were at fault.)

According to news received by the Greek consul, 10 people were killed by the Ottoman army on the Wednesday when the Gemidzhii began their actions, 30 people were killed on the Thursday and, along with the people killed later, the total number had reached 50.

A "crazed crowd" had gathered to search for the culprits. The culprits, according to the "crazed crowd", were all those people who for years, they heard, were fighting against the Turkish authorities in the mountains and the villages. The culprits were known as the "Komiti". While the police searched the houses of the Exarchates and arrested the men, the soldiers and the "crazed crowd" known as the "Bashibozuks" raged in the streets. H. Kotsev, while attempting to hide so that he would not be arrested, took refuge in the home of teacher F. Iosevova. Iosefova, not taking the situation seriously, decided to go to work and her father decided to go out to the store



and buy something. But both of them came back very quickly. The father returned home first followed closely by the daughter who told Kotsev what was happening outside.

He said: “The situation outside is very bad. I was unable to go to the main road. The Ottomans, the Greeks and the Jews were all yelling furiously as if chasing a rabid dog... The Ottomans had bayonets on their rifles and the Greeks and Jews (may God strike them dead) were carrying stones and clubs and were beating up people and, dead or alive, were throwing their bodies onto carts...”

She said: “All the streets in the bazaar were occupied by Ottomans, Greeks and Jews who had come here to hunt down and kill Exarchates. Without knowing, our people (Macedonians) went to work, to open their stores and, as they showed up on the main street, the Ottomans, Greeks and Jews pounced on them with knives, sticks and stones, and killed them. Whoever went to the bazaar did not return. There was no one in the school – everyone was hiding.” (H. Kotsev, 52.)

Fortunately the damage done was not as bad as that perpetrated against the Armenians. There were several reasons for that. The Ottoman authorities could not afford to do here in Europe what they had done in Asia against the Armenians. Memories from the Armenian massacre were still fresh in people’s minds and the Sultan could not afford a repeat of the Armenian incident in such a short time afterwards. A repeat of the same act would have gravely damaged relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Great Powers. The Solun Vali had to act fast in order to prevent the “crazed crowds” from taking the law into their own hands. A massive massacre in Macedonia was prevented, not because it was inspired by some kind of humanitarian deed but for higher state interests.

This sort of Great Power intervention, in this case, had significant impact on the Ottoman military and police and on the Solun “Bashibozuks”. The first demand the consuls made to the Vali was to do everything in his power to prevent “irresponsible” people from interfering in bringing order to the city. Putting military pressure on the Ottomans to enforce this was of paramount importance. On May

1, 1903 an Italian warship arrived in Solun port and was followed by Austrian and French warships. There could have been a repeat of what happened in 1876, when the German and French consuls in Solun were violently murdered by the fanatic Muslim masses. At that time the city found itself occupied by the Great Power navy. The same could have easily happened this time as well. But, before the Great Powers had a chance to threaten with invasions, the Ottoman authorities and the “Bashibozuks” decided to end the atrocities. They decided to wash the blood-stained streets and to re-open the stores. It was of paramount importance that Solun get back to normal life as soon as possible.

The appearance of the warships had a calming effect on the Macedonian population belonging to the Exarchate Church. This unfortunately created the false hope that with their self-sacrifice the Gemidzhii had actually yielded some results. Here is how H. Kotsev, an educated man, a professor at the Exarchate gymnasium and a politician, described the situation: “...I heard thunder. I looked and what did I see? Several black bears appeared on the horizon and entered the bay while shooting their usual salvos. They responded to them from “Edi Kule” (the notorious prison in Solun) with the usual greeting. I understood that it was an Italian squadron, which had received orders to come to the aid of the Christians who were being slaughtered. One or two hours later, new thunder drew my attention and I saw a dozen new bears - an Austrian squadron. A while later just as many French and English warships arrived, overwhelming the Ottomans: the autonomy for Macedonia was coming. I was overwhelmed with joy, I went downstairs to the host (Kotsev was in hiding in another friend’s place) and asked him to go outside for a bit and look around. I thought he might learn something comforting. He was happy when he returned.”

‘Tell me quickly what did you see?’ I asked him impatiently.

‘It would appear that the Ottoman goose has been cooked. The bears are coming to evict the Ottomans and introduce autonomy. The ‘crazed’ people have stopped the killing... There is blood in the streets, in the bazaars... everywhere. But, to prevent the Europeans from seeing it, they forced the Gypsies to wash away the puddles.

They issued an order to open the bazaars and declare that everyone was free to go about doing their business...’ he replied.” (Ibid, 54.)

The more Europe interfered in Ottoman internal affairs, the more the ruling circles in Tsari Grad became sensitive and irritable. Among other things, they regarded the outside interference as an encouragement for the Macedonian revolutionary movement, which was now seen as the “guilty” party for having committed the Solun events. It was not difficult for the Ottoman authorities to notice the kind of impact the warships had on the Macedonian population which, using the assassinations as an occasion, planned to do more serious damage. That is why the High Port did everything it could to convince the Great Powers to pull their ships out of Solun. The basic Ottoman argument, of course, was that by bringing their ships to Solun, the Great Powers encouraged the Christians to rebel. It was a “logical” argument which the ambassadors in Tsari Grad understood and decided to take action upon. The ships were withdrawn after the Grand Vizier promised them that the authorities would capture all the perpetrators and punish them in the spirit of their laws. And for the Ottomans, the entire Macedonian population was guilty and responsible for this. That is why the arrests and terror continued in Macedonia.

The Gemidzhii were planning to sink the “Guadalquivir” close to shore. It was necessary to destroy and sink the ship without causing any casualties among the passengers and the crew. But when Shatev saw the ship slowly moving away from the port he became very upset. Circumstances, as we mentioned earlier, did not allow him to light the fuse at the appropriate time. But after the explosion took place and the passengers were loaded onto the rescue boats, he declared with satisfaction:

“I rejoice with all my soul to see the ship burning and with no human casualties because it was never our intention to seek human sacrifices, even more so since the passengers on this ship are innocent in terms of our Macedonian cause...” (P. Shatev, 365.)

As mentioned earlier, the dynamite bombs the Gemidzhii threw at the cafés were made with long fuses to give the café customers the opportunity to leave the shops in a timely manner. The goal,

therefore, was to create attention, to make as much noise as possible, to create panic and to attack the enemy. And all this was to be done, if possible, with as few casualties as possible. And fortunately it was carried out exactly the way it was planned.

Casualties among the civilian population were minimal. When the Bank was dynamited one of its walls collapsed and part of it fell on the German club and the rest of it fell inside the courtyard of the “Alhambra”, one of the main hotels in Solun. Because of this a French subject, a merchant, and an Italian shoemaker were killed. Some Germans and Austrians were wounded, as was an Italian dress maker. When the bank collapsed debris from it also landed on a horse drawn wagon and killed a German engineer named Heckel. There was also the body of a Greek waiter extracted from the ruins of the “Alhambra”. (P. Shatev, 386, *Makedonika*, 76, cited report of the French Consul in Solun. May 7, 1903.)

There were no Muslim or European civilian casualties reported. We could find no such references in our existing sources.

The number of Ottoman soldiers killed is also unknown. Given the fact that the bombs made of dynamite and thrown at the Ottoman authorities by the Gemidzhii were primitive, we can assume that the number of soldiers and gendarmes killed was probably insignificant. Three officials were killed at the bank and one at the post office.

There were also inaccurate reports being circulated that implied that the Gemidzhii were planning to attack Greek properties in Solun. It was unknown if the Gemidzhii had such intentions but we can say that dynamite was far too expensive and hard to come by to be used against Greek educational institutions. At some point in time even Evgeniadis felt obliged to say something about that. He wrote: “I find it necessary here to say that, despite all the rumours, none of the Greek community facilities or numerous churches in the city were attacked...” (*Makedonika*, 79.)

Fears expressed by the Great Power consuls that the conspirators would attack their consulates turned out to be unwarranted. Steg, for example, after hearing the loud explosions, ordered his people to keep their eyes open as to who was entering and leaving the

consulate, “knowing that the revolutionaries would not spare foreign officials”. The consuls, of course, could not have known if their buildings would be attacked or not. The bombing of the ship, the railway and the bank caused them to suspect that anything belonging to the Great Powers would be attacked. Their families, as we said earlier, were taken to the French hospital where they were guarded by the Ottoman army. On May 4, 1903 Sister Pisi wrote: “...We are beginning to be convinced that the assassins have nothing against us. The consuls have taken their families back to their own homes. Only the family of the bank director is still here with us because his home has been burned down.”

As for the material damage caused by the Gemidzhii, that too did not seem to be as significant as it appeared at first glance. Outside of the ship and the beautiful Ottoman bank building, the damage was not so great. The inside of the bank, where the money and other treasures were kept, was not damaged. About 150,000 Ottoman liras in cash and other valuables as well as important documents and books, were all recovered. (Ibid.)

# PART THREE

## AFTER THE ATTACKS

### MASSACRES

The Gemidzhii did not want to create victims out of innocent people and did everything in their power to minimize their numbers. However, a very important question arises from all this. The Gemidzhii were well aware of how the Ottoman authorities had reacted to the Armenian occupation of the bank in Tsari Grad, where they committed terrible violence against the innocent Armenian population. Did the Gemidzhii not think that by destroying capitalist properties in Solun (regardless of sparing innocent people) they would create terrible panic and destruction in one of the most important cities in the Ottoman Empire, which would lead to Ottoman retaliation against the Macedonian people, similar to the massacres perpetrated against the Armenian population? There is nothing in the memoirs of the surviving Gemidzhii that would answer this question. Believing that the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization would not be able to raise a general uprising and achieve the results it was looking for, the Gemidzhii regularly highlighted the grave consequences that the population would suffer. The Gemidzhii believed that, with their personal self-sacrifice and without mass participation, they could achieve more than the MRO could with the broad masses. It seems that the Gemidzhii did not take into consideration the large scale retaliation the Ottomans would take against the Macedonian population when they unleashed their actions on Solun.

It is not that important to know what the Gemidzhii thought and what predictions and assumptions they made. They had a mission and their mission needed to be carried out. The Ottoman authorities, on the other hand, used the Gemidzhii actions as a pretext to attack and compromise the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization in order to break its ability to rise against the Sultan and the Ottoman regime in Macedonia.

As we said earlier, the casualties resulting from the Gemidzhii actions were few. The casualties resulting from the Ottoman retaliations, however, were many, not as many as the retaliation against the Armenians but still many. The biggest victims of Ottoman retaliation for the “small” pogroms committed by the Gemidzhii in Solun were the Macedonian people associated with the Exarchate Church. The Vardar and Kufal neighbourhoods suffered the greatest damage. Besides the massacres, hundreds of houses were also robbed and many women were wounded. We don’t know, and we will never know, exactly how many Macedonians were killed. “It was very difficult,” wrote Steg, “to determine the exact number of those who died on April 29 and 30. The estimates varied between 35, a figure which the Ottoman Vali had given us, to more than 300, which is more correct, a figure given to us by the Europeans, mainly by the Germans and Austrians who lived in the western parts of the city where the Exarchate population lived.”

The official figure of 35 to 40 was derived from the number of people buried in the Exarchate cemetery, which seemed like a “very small” number to many people including Steg. Steg personally counted 20 bodies. Some Ottoman officers were claiming that 112 Exarchates had been killed. This figure seemed more probable. Regarding this Steg wrote: “...It is impossible to determine the precise figures. It will be impossible even after the investigations are completed because we have no idea how many people were arrested and imprisoned. It is also very difficult to find out what happened to the bodies that were not taken to the cemetery, and it is certain that not all were taken there. Here is an example: According to the statement given in their consulates, one Italian and one German person saw how the Albanians broke the door of an Exarchate Church and killed the priest who was there. I was assured that no bodies belonging to priests were taken to the cemetery...” (Report from the French Consulate in Solun, May 7, 1903.)

Here is what Steg, the French consul, personally saw and heard right after the Gemidzhii attacked Solun. As we mentioned earlier, during the night of April 29, 1903, after the first explosions were heard, Steg and the other consuls immediately went out looking for the city Vali. Around midnight Steg returned to his consulate and remained

there until dawn because it was dangerous for him to move around the city streets during the night.

“In the morning,” wrote Steg, “I took a car to visit our facilities and see had what happened the night before. There was great excitement in our hospital on the other side of the Ottoman bank divided by a narrow street. The crew of the “Guadalquivir” located in the hospital, successfully localized the fire on the neighbouring wing of the bank and by doing so saved our institution.

A little further down the same block, two young men, barricaded in a house next to the German school, were throwing bombs at the policemen and soldiers who had them surrounded. One of the boys managed to escape, the other was killed. His body, which I saw being loaded onto a wagon, was a body of a young man 20 to 22 years old. He was dressed in miserable European clothes, the type that were common to all the criminals who were caught or killed that night and the next day.

Arrests and searches were carried out all night long. A number of criminals defended themselves by throwing bombs at the authorities. Some were killed on the run. These struggles lasted until the afternoon of April 30. The last one was in a house near the institution of the merciful sisters. This one caused a lot of excitement in our nuns and in the “Guadalquivir” crew, who thought they were the targets of the conspirators.

While doing my duty working in the city, this day alone I saw at least 15 garbage carts loaded with two or three dead bodies. I had reason to be afraid that this repression would turn, at least in some places, into a massacre. When I returned to the hospital around 4:30 a.m., a Frenchman approached me and told me that three refugees had been massacred in his house (by Ottoman authorities) in the presence of his family. I took him in my car with me, as well as an Italian man who was also a witness and drove them to Vali’s lodge.

The Vali said he had all the city quarters surrounded where murders had taken place that morning. He advised and persuaded the Ottoman “Bashibozuks”, army and police to establish order, and



warned them that anyone using “excessive” force would be severely punished.

“But even though the Vali had done whatever he could,” wrote Steg, “still it was necessary to tell him that the abuses continued and needed to be stopped without delay. From asking the witnesses what they saw I understood that people were being killed in the streets after they were arrested. I also understood that around 5 o’clock, an Ottoman officer encircled the streets and forbade the killing or beating of the captured prisoners, ordering his men to use weapons only against those who resisted arrest or carried weapons or bombs. These orders were respected and, after this, I don’t think there were any more such killings.” (Ibid.)

The need for Steg and the other consuls to find the Ottoman Vali and personally report to him and warn him of the violence and massacres committed was not because they just found out such crimes were being committed, but because a crime was committed in a Frenchman’s home. The consuls were well aware of the crimes committed against the Macedonians by the Ottoman authorities but felt it was not their concern. This time, however, a crime was committed in the home of one of their own which was considered great insolence, but also a dangerous threat to the lives of foreign citizens.

The house in which H. Michelle and the Italian Badetti were living was located in the “Vardar” neighbourhood. This neighbourhood was inhabited largely by Macedonians belonging to the Exarchate Church. On April 30, 1903, around 3 pm, two people, being pursued by gendarmes and soldiers, entered Michelle’s yard in order to save themselves from their angry pursuers. Michelle yelled at them to leave the yard because his house was not a “refuge for rebels”, but they refused to leave being well aware that they would be caught and killed. Then some of the tenants of the house called the police. The police, accompanied by fifty gendarmes armed with revolvers and Albanians armed with sticks, entered the yard and first killed a sixty-year-old homeless man who often slept there. One of the two intruders ran into Michelle’s apartment where his family and some relatives were staying. In pursuit of him, the gendarmes broke into the apartment, abducted and killed the man on the spot. They then,

with rifles and revolvers in hand, took him out to the street and paraded him around. While looking for the other man, they again broke into Michelle's apartment and found the man dressed in an apron with a plate of salad in his hand, pretending to be the French family's cook. The man was hoping that the Frenchman's Christian charity would not allow him to hand him over to the bloodthirsty beasts. About this Michelle wrote: "All the gendarmes in one voice asked me if I knew the man and when I told them that I did not know him, they massacred him here in my apartment in the presence of my family. Everyone was horrified and overcome by fear. Then, after that, we left our house and hid in the quarters of "St. Nicholas"...'" (Annex to the May 7, 1903 French Consulate Solun report.)

In response to being constantly questioned by the authorities, who, like angry tigers lashed at them questioning them as to who they were and where they had come from, also fearing that they would become victims "of gendarme anger", the residents of the home decided to hoist a French flag in the yard in order to protect themselves.

We should mention at this point that the two men who were massacred were not assassins or rebels, and were not even carrying weapons. They were "guilty" solely because they did not want to fall into the hands of the police and the "Bashibozuks" and be killed.

The other consuls in Solun also made certain assumptions when determining the number of slain and massacred Macedonians. Di Rivel, the Italian general consul, in his report to his Foreign Minister Admiral Morin, said he believed that less than 100 Macedonians were killed, probably 70-80. Di Rivel too witnessed many garbage wagons each carrying 2 to 3 dead bodies. There were rumours, however, that more than 300 people were killed during the days of the repressions but, according to Di Rivel, there was no evidence of this. N. Bilioti, the English general consul in Solun said that, according to the bodies buried in the Exarchate cemetery, 30-32 people had been killed. Bilioti did not provide any information about the numbers and who they were killed by, the military or police, but, according to him, one thing was certain – this was not a slaughter. (Turkey No. 1 (1904), Doc 123.) Steg agreed with the English

consul's conclusion. He wrote: "As much as I regret what happened, it can still be argued that the incidents were relatively minor and that we should all be happy that they did not result in heavy losses. The Muslim population was set aside during the repressions and the army performed its duty without massacring people, for which it should be commended. Without a doubt, this outcome was primarily due to the directives sent from Tsari Grad, where it was understood what kind of favour the Ottoman Empire would receive if it went wild to counterbalance the horror of the assassinations in the eyes of the European public."

Steg, as well as some of the other consuls, showed their appreciation to the Vali for preventing a massacre in Solun. This appreciation was highlighted in a report sent to Delkase, Minister of Foreign Affairs in which Steg specifically pointed out: "But I must acknowledge the efforts of our general governor who kept away the Muslim population. His attitude was vigorous and correct, and the public opinion here is that a great evil was prevented. This, of course, was due mainly to his personal influence and personal examples of courage and determination, which he showed by traveling the streets in an open wagon countless times. The officer corps also demonstrated exemplary discipline and cold determination, and it cannot be held responsible, in its entirety, for the excesses which, in such circumstances, were inevitable." (Report of the French Consulate in Solun, May 7, 1903.)

The general conclusion was that there were no mass massacres and murders even though it was impossible to precisely specify the number of Macedonians killed in the retaliations. The Ottoman authorities, this time, as they had always done, managed to hide the terror and the killings they had perpetrated mainly because the relatives of the victims, especially at such critical times, had nowhere to report their problems. For economic and political reasons, and due to the great uncertainty that reigned inside Macedonia in the recent months, many Macedonians went to live and work in Solun. The majority of these people, a large number of them, had no personal connections to the city so their disappearance was very difficult to detect, especially by the foreigners who lived there.

There were some people who did not believe the Ottoman figures that only 30 to 40 Macedonians had been killed during the Ottoman revenge killings in Solun. There were just as many people who did not believe that the figure was over 300. So it only seems appropriate to assume the figure to be somewhere in the range of say 100 to 120 people.

And while rightly so, Fahmi Pasha, the Vali of Solun, was given recognition for his contribution to the prevention of atrocities, it was the Ottoman army commanders who actually held back the police and the “Bashibozuks” from perpetrating large-scale massacres while hunting down the Solun assassins. It was also amazing that the Gemidzhii, with their grand plans and preparations to wreak havoc on this important city, were not discovered. The city bustling with foreigners and diplomats, a large Marine shopping centre, where the police and Hamid Pasha’s agents were always alert and vigilant suspected nothing. The incompetence of the authorities surprised everyone, especially the envoys and foreigners who were well aware that Macedonia was a boiling pot that could explode at any time, yet they suspected nothing. The foreigners were also aware of the cruelty the Ottoman authorities demonstrated towards the Macedonian population and that they suspected every single Macedonian of working for the Macedonian revolutionary movement, yet they believed the Macedonians were incapable of committing such acts.

There were “indications” that “something” was being prepared in Solun but, it seems, it was not that important to the foreigners and to the authorities to notice, or they were simply not familiar with what was going on. But whatever it was, it should have been very important to the police, especially after the discovery of the tunnel at the Ottoman Bank in Tsari Grad. Almost everyone who was aware of the existence of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and followed its revolutionary events in Macedonia should have guessed that anything was possible, not just in Tsari Grad but everywhere in Macedonia. The police naturally should have been the first to suspect such activities could be possible.

Hamid’s police force further showed its incompetence later by not taking appropriate measures even after rumours were flying

everywhere, including in some European newspapers, suspecting that the Macedonian revolutionaries were preparing attacks on various important institutions in Solun and other cities in Macedonia. More incompetent than that was the fact that no measures were taken to properly protect the Ottoman bank in Solun. The bank was well guarded from surface attacks but, it seems, they did not suspect an attack from underground. How was that even possible after their experience in Tsari Grad, after the authorities had discovered the underground tunnel there? How could they not suspect that the bank could be threatened from underground?

Everyone should have noticed that a large number of unemployed young people were moving into the city. Most did not deal with conspiratorial activities, however, there were also those who seemed suspicious, yet no one suspected them of anything. For example, the “barber shop” was rented for a short time then abandoned. A little later the “grocery store” next to it was rented by the same people. The same young men went in and out of both the “barbershop” and the “grocery store”. It should be underlined at this point that this neighbourhood was part of the Solun centre in which important European institutions were located. The neighbourhood in which the bank was located was known as the “Frank-Maalo” This neighbourhood housed a Catholic cathedral, a French hospital, a French-run female school, the American and Scottish missions, the Solun bank and a huge number of large merchant shops. Of course, the rent was expensive here. It was subsequently discovered that the rent for the “grocery store” was very high. The store was rented by Marko, in September 1902, who bought 20 Turkish liras worth of goods and did not purchase any more merchandise. When customers came in to buy goods they did not have Marko to give them the usual answer:

“We just ran out. We are expecting more but it’s tied up in the customs office. Come back tomorrow...”

Marko’s explanation seemed suitable and acceptable as long as it was not repeated too many times and too often.

To avoid being visited by the local authorities, the Gemidzhii paid their bills months in advance. As we have shown they did their best

to remain inconspicuous but there were some things they could not hide. For example, their frequent “grocery store” entry and exit. As much as they were careful they could not completely hide their “regular” visits.

Their excuses that they had come to Solun to idle away and spend their parents’ money having a good time was not convincing enough because they ate their meals mainly in modest restaurants owned by Macedonians. One of the Gemidzhii lived opposite the bank and they all lived in modest residences. The bank director did notice their movements but did not pay much attention. However, after what happened to the “Guadalquivir” and at the train station on April 28, 1903, the next morning the director reported his suspicions to the police commissioner and asked him to search the hotels and stores in the neighbourhood where the bank was located. (Ibid.)

“Do not be concerned, Mr. Director! The city is calm and the police are ready for anything!” he was assured by the police commissioner.

The commissioner was right when he said that the police were ready for anything. And despite the fact that there was only a small army present in Solun in those days, there were still enough forces in the city to protect the most important institutions such as the bank, the post office and other important buildings. Of course, the commissioner did not expect that the enemy would attack from under ground and did not know that these actions would be carried out by Macedonian suicide bombers. And the police commissioner did not fail to hear the persistent rumours that the goal of the revolutionaries was to blow up the Ottoman bank.

These “rumours” drove Steg to go to the Solun police station and make his “suspicions” known to the commissioner. Steg said:

“The blindness of the police allowed these kinds of things to be carried out in the immediate vicinity of the bank. The blindness of the police allowed such a large amount of dynamite to be brought into Solun by unknown suspicious persons who came and went without being noticed by your agents. These many unusual events, noticed by so many people, in the opinion of many, cannot be explained in any other way, except to say that: perhaps the police

were instructed to look the other way. Otherwise the revolutionaries would not dare take such action without heavy reprisals...”

Steg, with great reserve, then said: “I am not inclined to believe that the Ottoman authorities would be involved in such conspiracies, and I am sure that the Solun Vali and Hasan-Fehmi-pasha are not involved in such conspiracies. However, I find it necessary to point out to you that such rumours, I promise you, will be published by some newspapers, be it in the west or... in Bulgaria...” (Ibid.)

The inability of the police to expose the Macedonian revolutionaries was obvious. This can be explained by the fact that the Ottoman administration in Macedonia was completely disorganized. It is not like the Great Powers did not make recommendations to the Ottomans to reform their army and police, but it appears that these recommendations were either ignored or the administrators were incapable of implementing them. Now, it would appear, the same people who failed to expose the Gemidzhii in the first place were placed in charge of investigating their actions. One can now see why the authorities did not want to reveal the facts about the Gemidzhii actions... because they wanted to hide their own mistakes. But that’s not how everyone saw the situation.

The way the Gemidzhii were organized and operated, it would have been hard for any police to fight against them. They did not belong to a large movement prone to breakdowns where information could be leaked to the authorities. The Gemidzhii were a small, isolated group of dedicated fighters who were determined to carry out their objectives at any cost. If they were caught during the planning period they could have been stopped but they were cautious. During the execution period, given their determination to fall in the battlefield at any given moment, their actions could not be undermined. Once they dug the tunnel and mined the foundation with dynamite, there was no force that could prevent them from blowing up the bank. There was a man on duty at all times in the grocery store ready to light the fuse and die in the explosion if necessary.

Outside of feeling frustrated and bitter about their actions, outside of their condemnation for the damages they had caused, most of the

people, including the foreign consuls in Solun, were quite impressed with the courage that the Gemidzhii showed. It was not entirely the fault of the Ottoman police for being unable to catch the Gemidzhii. It was more the will and courage of these young men who gave their lives for Macedonia's freedom, than the incompetence of the police, which brought them this far. Here is what Steg wrote about that: "No doubt there will be plenty to say about the desperate courage they showed while committing their crimes. It is hard to fight people who are ready to sacrifice their lives for their cause. But, at the same time, this could only have been done through isolated cases as was done by one terrorist who made his way through the many foreigners in the city without being noticed. The terrorists were few and very determined and that is why they succeeded in doing what they did on April 28, 29 and 30, without being found by the police." (Ibid.) But, at the same time, Steg and the others thought that the Ottoman authorities knew about the Gemidzhii and were allowing them to act so that it would give the Ottoman's a reason to crush the entire Macedonian movement.

The first legal measure taken by the Ottoman authorities to "protect" the population of Solun was the introduction of a curfew. People were forbidden from moving around the city from sundown to sun up. The government also introduced measures to create a military court so that the assassins would have a speedy trial. The military court was opened on May 4, 1903, the same day that the Sultan introduced these measures. The same measures also dealt with issues arising from breaking the curfew. On top of that the general public was forbidden from taking part in arrests, house searches, large group gatherings, spreading rumours, spreading false news and the like. People were forbidden from entering Solun without justifiable reasons. (Makedonika, 63-64.)

These measures gave the impression that all those who were guilty of taking part in the Solun events would answer to the court by legal means and that the state would not allow innocent individuals to share in guilt by association. There was a lot of truth to how justice was served but the manner in which it was served was fierce, bloody and brutal.



## EVENTS IN BITOLA AND OTHER PARTS OF MACEDONIA

There was no confirmation of the suspicion that the Ottoman police were actually “silent” on the Gemidzhii matter and allowed them to operate as a pretext to justify persecuting the Macedonian population and to crush the movement. However, the Ottomans did use the Solun events as a pretext to mass murder and repress the population. While the mass murders were avoided, the arrests and bullying of the Exarchate part of the Macedonian population, in almost all of Macedonia, was unprecedented.

The violent Solun events had a strong echo in the interior of Macedonia. The Ottoman authorities, as a pretext of suspecting the Macedonians of preparing to carry out similar actions in other Macedonian cities, as well as signaling the start of an uprising, used European displeasure to begin repressions outside of Solun in order to behead the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. The Solun events also fanaticized and united the Muslim population, which was now ready and willing to act against the Christians.

The prescribed solution for the Solun events prompted the Macedonian movement everywhere to defend itself in the spring of 1903. More armed cheti (military units) began to form and clash more frequently with the Ottoman army and police. At about the same time that the Gemidzhii were carrying out their actions in Solun, two significant clashes took place in Eastern Macedonia. According to a version given by the Ottoman authorities, one cheta, which numbered about 50 people, was completely destroyed. The Ottomans claim that among the dead they allegedly found two Bulgarian majors and two captains. The other cheta, numbering 46 people, was also allegedly destroyed with 29 killed and 17 captured. And while this information, especially the numbers of dead and captured, was difficult to accept, it was confirmed. About this Steg wrote to Delkasi as follows: “There was a significant clash in Banitsa, Seres Region, on May 4, 1903... If it is true, as we have found out from various sources, one Delchev from the Macedonian Revolutionary Movement was killed during the fighting. As is being claimed, he was one of the main organizers and his loss has caused irreparable damage...” (A.M. 238, French Consulate in Solun to Delkase, Solun, May 13, 1903.)

The Ottoman authorities used their cunning and skill to prove to the Europeans that the Solun events were actually carried out by members of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and that the Organization was closely connected with the Bulgarian government and worked under its directive. This was done under the framework of a well-known Ottoman propaganda policy designed to convince Europe that the Macedonian Revolutionary Movement was driven from the outside, from Bulgaria, and that the movement was not the result of Ottoman burdens on the local socio-economic conditions and the Sultan's exploitation and terror tactics. The Ottomans, therefore, outwardly refused to accept the terms "Macedonian Organization", "Macedonian Committee" and so on. From a European perspective, the Ottomans made it to be almost all "Bulgarian" and the struggle in Macedonia was all about expanding the Bulgarian borders into Macedonia and not liberating Macedonia. The same kind of thinking was used by the Greek diplomacy in their propaganda.

Now the High Port was keenly interested in convincing the Great Powers that the "anarchist crimes" in Solun were the work of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. The Ottomans actually wanted to "blame" the entire Macedonian population for the Solun events in order to justify their reprisals against them. One of the important "arguments" used by the Ottomans to convince the Great Powers that the Solun events were the work of the revolutionary organization was the use of dynamite against Ottoman soldiers in the street battles. The coincidences of the frequent clashes with the Ottoman army in April and early May, as well as the more frequent use of dynamite by the cheti, "was presented as evidence that the violence in Solun was committed by the revolutionary committee..." wrote Steg. (Ibid.) The Ottoman authorities did not make this claim to simply throw "sticks and stones" at the Exarchates in Macedonia. They made the claim in order to justify a policy of mass imprisonment and persecution. By this claim they did not just launch mass persecution against the Exarchates in Solun, they launched it against all of Macedonia.

In contrast to the Ottoman authorities who declared everyone who fought against them in Macedonia a "Bulgarian criminal" and had

no interest in distinguishing between the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, the Supreme Committee and the Gemidzhii, some of the Great Power diplomats had different ideas. Some tried harder and did penetrate into the substance of the problem, discovering that it was the Gemidzhii, an independent group (from the MRO), who committed the “assassinations” in Solun. Here we have often quoted the French Consul General because his reports are more detailed and more objective than any others. Even though the French capitalists had suffered the worst from the Gemidzhii actions, and Steg had the right to be more bitter about it than his colleagues, he was the most accurate in evaluating and describing the events.

On May 7, 1903, in his first comprehensive report regarding the Solun assassinations Steg wrote: “It is still difficult to determine the origin and the true extent of these events. We don’t have enough information to solve this crucial issue. Are the assassinations the work of an isolated group of revolutionaries with anarchist tendencies? Do they come from one of the two major committees: the Bulgarian committee or the internal association (by “Bulgarian Committee” Steg means the “Supreme Committee”, and by “internal association” he means the “MRO”) or are they a product of an agreement between the two committees or, ultimately, whether the committees or one of them, helps with their performance, without themselves having to conceive and conduct themselves?”

Both the diplomats and the general public were still unaware of who the Gemidzhii were and whether they worked alone or under the command of the MRO. The Ottoman authorities unfortunately were not interested in the details of this and in fact they did not want to know (they could have known because on April 30, 1903 they had P. Shatev in their hands). The only thing the Ottoman authorities were now interested in and preoccupied with, was the question: “How to destroy the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and curb or stop the impending uprising”.

After Solun, Bitola was the next city to suffer the most.

By the morning of April 30, 1903, rumours about the Solun assassinations fully engulfed Bitola creating great panic in the people. At the same time military and police patrols intensified and

tension in the city began to grow rapidly. There were rumours being spread that as soon as the signal of an uprising was given, the entire Exarchate population would be slaughtered. Gotier, the French Vice-Consul in Bitola, spoke with Dr. B. Beshkov, acting manager in the Bulgarian agency (a diplomatic representative), and told him that it was in the interest of the population to be peaceful, because otherwise it would be threatened with a grim “catastrophe”. (Liberation struggle of the Bulgarians in Macedonia and Odrin 1902/1904. Diplomatic documents, Sofia, 1978, document No 48.)

In order for the rumours to appear as more than just rumours, the Ottoman authorities in Bitola decided to do something. By order of the Bitola chief of police they employed several former tax collectors, all “Greeks”. Then, accompanied by police officials, these “Greeks” were sent into the city streets to identify the houses in which Macedonian Exarchates lived. (Ibid, doc 50. The Bulgarian diplomat, mentioned earlier, thought that the “registration” of the houses was done in preparation for a massacre. But according to Gotier, the French Vice-Consul, the “survey” was done to facilitate the monitoring of suspicious persons. A.M.F. 238 - Vice-Consul of France in Bitola to Constan, Ambassador of the Republic of France in Tsari Grad, Bitola, May 5, 1903.) Of course, the aim behind all this was not that difficult to figure out. They made it clear to the Macedonian population that it was under their control and that if anything similar happened in Bitola, which had happened in Solun, or if an uprising was raised, the Macedonians would pay with their lives... they should expect a bloody revenge. By creating a climate of fear and pressure, the authorities wanted to push the Organization to leave Bitola and encourage opposition against it. On April 29, 1903 the Bitola Vali visited the Great Power consuls and informed them that his vilayet was in danger of being attacked because the Macedonian cheti were preparing for an uprising. The Vali, it seems, wanted the consuls to know that he was prepared to deal with the Macedonian population in the event of an uprising. Of course this threat was not made on behalf of the Ottoman government, but allegedly on behalf of the Muslim population.

Threats did not always materialize into action in those days but they did during the Ilinden Uprising.

Bitola was the centre of the district revolutionary movement from which every act and every clash in the mountains or villages was rehearsed. There was great tension building in that city and increased as the time of the uprising approached. The Muslim population in Bitola was very upset. Its rage was about to explode. It was now looking for a reason... for an excuse to explode and that reason was found in the Solun assassinations.

“The events that took place in Solun,” wrote Gotier, “have further heightened the turmoil in the Bitola population, and it is more than ever convinced that the city, being the seat of the main members of the revolutionary committee, is threatened and, very soon, a catastrophe will befall it more terrible than that of Solun.” (Gotier to Constan, Bitola, May 5, 1903.)

The Bitola Vali took strict measures to preserve the peace in Bitola. Patrols were sent around the city, one after another in close proximity, to monitor the mosques where Muslim fanatics usually started their crimes, and so on. But in spite of all that, there were circles in power that did not want peace. Quite the opposite...

On Wednesday May 6, 1903, during the Giurgevden (St. Georges) holiday, the Bitola consuls together with the Bitola Vali paid a visit to the Greek consul on the occasion that it was the Greek king's name day. At about 11:30 am, at the moment when the champagne was being served, the Vali's assistant entered the consulate and said something to the Vali. A minute or two later the Vali apologized to the guests and left. It was clear to everyone that something serious had happened. About half an hour later the city was “occupied” by the Ottoman military and the town centre and marketplace were closed down. Panic began to set in among the Bitola residents. Everyone was told to stay put wherever they were because the military had banned all movement in the streets. This was the situation until 4:30 pm, but the blockade yielded nothing. After that the military units that had occupied the city were replaced by military patrols. In about an hour all the streets were cleared and everyone ran back to their homes. The streets became deserted by nightfall except, of course, for the fast moving military patrols which maintained a watchful eye on things. But even though the city

was blockaded, there was news that murders had been committed in many places in the city that day. But really, what happened that day? Here is what was written in the Organization's memoirs:

“In the morning of May 6, 1903, a number Ottoman troublemakers and professional criminals, accompanied by police officers and gendarmes, for no reason at all attacked the Christian population in the Bitola Bazaar and, with great rage, killed and wounded everyone with whom they came into contact. The terror targeted all Christians and in moments everyone left the marketplace in panic... The criminals, followed by the police, then triumphantly marched down the city streets, firing at the windows of houses and at every Christian they met on their way. The whole city trembled with fear. The panic was indescribable and unprecedented. The Christian people barricaded themselves in their homes expecting death to arrive at any moment...” (Macedonia and Odrin (1893-1903). Memoirs of the Internal Organization - 1904, 114.)

The reasons for the Bitola massacre were obvious to all those who were familiar and who followed revolutionary activities. The Solun assassinations were a good reason for the “Bashibozuks” (armed Muslim civilians) to come out in the streets of Bitola but more was needed, something that was specific to Bitola. So even though the massacres were committed by Ottoman criminals, the Ottoman authorities put the blame on the Macedonians. The Bitola Vali officially blamed the riots on the Exarchates who, according to him, allegedly attacked several Muslims and tried to blow up the gunpowder depot. “There can be no question about who attacked the gunpowder depot,” wrote M. Ristich, the Serbian general consul in Bitola, “the claims made by the Vali during his announcement are plain lies... My impression is that these events are a consequence of the general excitement... that has existed in these parts for a long time. That excitement was intensified by the Solun events and by the rumours that similar events might take place here in Bitola. These bloody events which manifested themselves should have never taken place. There was no justifiable reason for them...” (Reports from 1903 by the Serbian consuls, metropolitans and school inspectors in Macedonia. Editorial and comments: Liuben Lape, Skopje 1954, 202-205.)

The appearance of more armed rebels and cheti, in preparation for the imminent uprising, which by now was well-known to the Ottomans, prompted the Ottoman military authorities to expand their security services by adding infantry and cavalry patrols inside the city and beyond. A man named Giche Oshavkov from Debar, working as a tailor in Bitola, was an active and prolific supplier of weapons to the Organization. He was connected with some Turks and Albanians from Gostivar, who on his order transported hundreds of guns and munitions for the needs of the Organization. One of his employees, a Turk, was expected to arrive in Bitola on May 6, 1903 to deliver the weapons. But since his cargo could not have been brought to the city without being discovered, it was agreed that two members of the Organization would wait for him on the road under the village Tsapari and when the right signal was given, he was to unload the cargo in Tsapari.

While waiting for the supplier to arrive, the two MRO members, who were dressed like policemen from Tsapari, were spotted by one of those Ottoman patrols who fired on them and chased them towards the village. Surprised by the patrol's gunfire, the villagers from Tsapari grabbed their rifles and opened fire on the patrol. And thus began the famous battle between the Ottoman military patrol and the Tsapari militia, which disturbed the entire region as well as the delegates at the Smilevo congress, who had to stop their work in order to send an armed force to aid the Tsapari militia.

In the meantime, the cargo sent from Debar on six horses arrived at the designated place, but instead of meeting with the two MRO people it encountered the Ottoman patrol and a fierce battle in Tsapari. Surprised and frantic with fear the man left for Bitola. Too impatient to wait, Giche and a friend, without knowing anything about what was happening, decided to go to "Dovlezhik" to find out what was happening with the delivery of the weapon. On the way they were surprised to run into the cargo headed for Bitola. They found out from the man what was taking place in Tsapari and realized that going towards Bitola would be very dangerous because they would be running into more Ottoman soldiers. Given the situation, Bitola would be sending reinforcements to Tsapari and any attempt to transfer the weapons to Bitola would be very risky. There was an old cemetery and a small churchyard nearby so, while

wondering what to do, they put the horses in the churchyard and summoned the cemetery caretaker to have a word with him.

Ginche said to him: “A while ago you said to me that you were disappointed that you had not been made a member of the Organization because you thought that we did not trust you. Well, you were wrong! We do trust you. Now, before the church, we would like you to take an oath that you will serve the Organization faithfully, and by doing that we will make you a member. And as a member your first task will be, a very risky task, to hide these weapon...”

And so, the caretaker took the oath, then dug up a number of empty graves and hid the guns and gunpowder in them.

Discovery of these weapons could have caused an affair with severe consequences. They were lucky that the delivery man was a Turk and this delivery ended well because, first, he was not stopped on the way and second, Oshavkov ran into him on his way to Tsapari. However, this transfer of weapons was the cause of the battle in Tsapari and that conflict, in turn, gave the “Bashibozuks” in Bitola reason for a massacre.

After the clash, two horsemen rushed to Bitola and passed on the news that an “uprising” was taking place in the village Tsapari. Learning of this, the Muslims began to gather at the administrative headquarters and prepared to attack any Christian who passed by.

With permission from Luka Dzherov, temporary leader of the organizational affairs in Bitola, because the other leaders were attending the Smilevo Congress, two of the ten rebels from Riste Samardzia’s cheta grabbed two rifles left for them by two Turks in an inn and took to the streets. With guns “sort of” hidden under their coats, they were spotted by some Muslims while passing through a Muslim neighbourhood. By now all the Muslims knew about the “uprising” in Tsapari, so naturally they assumed the “uprising” had arrived in Bitola. “The sum of those few events,” wrote Dzherov, “the comrades in the village Tsapari, the rebels in Bitola, the rumours of an inevitable uprising and the inevitable attack on Bitola... hardened the Turks to such an extent that they were forced



to kill every Macedonian on the road...” (Fighting in South-West Macedonia, according to Luka Dzherov and Lazar Dimitrov’s memoirs. Giorgi Abadzhiev, Skopje, 1952, 25-28.)

The reason that not too many Christians were massacred in the Bitola killings was because the Muslims began to gather in the afternoon when most of the people were at home as well as because the Bitola Bazaar was closed immediately, a lesson learned from Solun. After the Bazaar was closed the “Bashibozuks” raged through the streets but did not attack any Christian homes. Of course, this was prompted by the city Vali’s rapid intervention.

Needing to know what to do, as was signaled by the way the lights were lit in the houses, even in the Bair-Maalo houses, Luka Dzherov’s answer was: “Let the Turks demonstrate in the streets but shoot to kill if they attack the houses...”

Luka Dzherov, who, through the organizational network, followed events in detail, wrote: “...for the honour of Bitola, no one was frightened. The people in danger locked their gates but were ready to defend themselves with weapons and with anything else they had in their possession...”

Attempts to massacre Christians were again made the next day, on May 7, 1903, and ended with the killing of 3 elders in isolated streets.

On May 7, 8 and 9, 1903, almost all economic and social activities in Bitola were shut down. The city and the bazaars were closed. No one was out on the streets except for the army. The authorities insisted on opening the bazaar but the Christian vendors and population in general would not leave their homes. “Today’s (May 9, 1903) situation, as was yesterday’s situation, is similar to that which took place on Giurgovden (St. Georges day) at noon,” wrote M. Ristich, “the market is still closed and fear prevails among the population, so despite the insistence of the authorities it is unknown when and whether peace and calm can be restored...” (Reports from 1903, 204.)

“It is certain,” wrote Gotier, “that time is needed for the public to calm down from the May 6 anxiety caused by the attacks with bombs and dynamite perpetrated by the Committee (he was probably thinking of the Solun events). It is not easy to unexpectedly find a breakthrough in the midst of wild fanaticism that has been hiding in the shadows for a long time...” (A.M., F. 238, Vice-Consul of France to Constan, Bitola, May 11, 1903.)

The bloody Giurgevden Wednesday left a terrible impression on the consuls and the general population. One week after the Solun events the massacres were repeated, except here, without significant cause. The “cause”, as the Vali pointed out, seemed unconvincing. There were persistent rumours that the massacres were organized by interested parties inside government circles and that they wanted them to coincide with the fighting in Tsapari and the theft of the rifles. (The Tsapari villagers fought bravely but, surprised by the overpowering foe, were forced to leave the village and retreat to the mountains. There was no accurate information of victims left behind. The Vali, according to Silianov, reported 11 killed and 74 captured. But according to Silianov around 40 villagers were captured. The villagers who could not escape were tied and brought to Bitola, where they were tortured terribly. Later 18 of them were convicted and sent to jail.) These rumours found support in other rumours according to which, the day before Giurgevden, the Ottoman keeper of account books told his Christian cook not to go outside on May 6, 1903. On May 5 other Turks also advised their Christian friends not to leave their homes the next day.

The Bitola streets were drenched with innocent Macedonian blood. How many Christians were killed in Bitola? How many were killed in Solun? No one knows the exact numbers. According to the memoirs we looked at, we found 14 killed, which is close to the figure given by the Vali, and 40 wounded. According to Luka Dzherov, 50-60 people were killed and 30-40 were wounded. Dozens were arrested on accusations of being “rebels” and then severely tortured. Six died in prison.

The killed and the wounded were treated like animals. According to the testimony of the municipal hospital pharmacist, where the dead and wounded were taken, “the dead and wounded alike were tossed

over one another on garbage carts. When they arrived at the hospital they did not take them off the carts one by one, they dumped them all on the ground and the people from the hospital had to sort them out, who was dead and who was alive.” On May 10, 1903, when the Russian and Austrian consuls visited the prison and the hospital, they found a truly incomprehensible situation. All the wounded were considered prisoners and were treated in the prison hospital.

‘Why were these people not placed in the ward for ordinary wounded people?’ Rostkovski asked the head of the gendarmerie who was accompanying the consuls.

‘I do not know!’ he answered. “There is not enough space there,” added the pharmacist’s assistant.” (Reports from 1903, 206)

Every Christian person the police and authorities encountered and took off the streets during the turmoil, guilty or not, was taken to prison. Every Christian person who had been wounded by the “Bashibozuks” and left to die on the street, and was subsequently brought to the hospital, was assumed to be “guilty” even though their injuries were caused by the Muslim mob assisted by the authorities.

And in spite of the fact that everyone in Bitola knew (Ristich, the Serbian consul, said that the Organization “did not provide a direct cause” for these unhappy events...” Reports from 1903, 207.) that the Organization (MRO) did not fire a single bullet, did not attack the house of a single Muslim and did not give a single serious reason for the Bitola massacres (following the example at Solun), Hilmi Pasha, the Ottoman general inspector for the three villas (Solun, Bitola and Skopje), whose seat was then in Skopje, went in front of the Russian consul in Skopje and in front of a number of correspondents from the “Budapestanski Hirlap” and “Manchester Guardian” and gave inaccurate and tendentious information (lied) about the events. Here is what he said: “On May 6 several places in the marketplace were attacked and bullets were fired against the Muslims. Three Muslims were wounded, including one imam. All Muslims in the city were peaceful, much more peaceful than in Solun. The soldier who took part in dispersing the rioters killed 11 and wounded 9 people.

Two villagers in Tsapari were wounded and 12 killed. The Tsapari villagers took part in the Bitola riots which provoked the Muslims to start the massacre..." (Ibid, 200. For the Bitola events also see: D. Dimeski, *The Giurgevden Massacre in Bitola 1903 - History VII, 2*, Skopje 1971, 147.)

The Solun events influenced events in the third vilayet centre in Skopje, but the Skopje events were not as bloody as those in Solun and Bitola. There were no casualties in Skopje. The "Bashibozuks" did not storm the markets and streets, and the authorities were satisfied with the arrests they made of everyone from the Exarchate communities who they suspected, guilty or not. Hilmi-Pasha campaigned against the Organization (MRO) in Skopje. He used the Solun assassinations to the maximum to compromise the revolutionary movement. The Ottomans also lost no time to complain to foreign correspondents that they were being attacked and threatened by "anarchists". In a conversation with a correspondent from the Manchester Guardian, Himli-Pasha ironically asked:

"Tell me Sir, after the events in Solun, did the European, or specifically the French press, sympathize with the rebels, who the French especially thanked for blowing up their ship in the port of Solun?" (Ibid, 186.)

The arrests were carried out under the pretext of preventing "planned" assassinations in the city. Unfortunately, after what had happened in Solun, no one had the courage to react. When Exarchate Metropolitan Sinesie went to "beg" for the release of some of the prisoners, Hilmi Pasha told him that it was this kind of "honest" people, merchants and teachers who carried out the assassinations in Solun.

"These kinds of assassinations are also expected here in Skopje," said Hilmi-Pasha. "Do you guarantee that such things will not happen here? If you guarantee me that I will immediately release the persons in whom you are interested!"

Sinese, of course, could not give such a guarantee.

As for the rumours of attacks on the consulates in Skopje, there is no doubt that they were especially spread by his agents and by Hilmi-Pasha himself. Even though these rumours had no basis, the measures taken by the authorities were considered normal. Hilmi-Pasha placed guards in front of all the consulates except for the Bulgarian consulate which he declared to be safe and did not need guarding. This gesture had a message in it saying that the agency of a country, which “manages” the revolution in Macedonia, could not be jeopardized by “its own” people. By doing this, Hilmi-Pasha wanted to “remind” the European diplomats that the struggle in Macedonia and the “anarchist” actions were “conducted by Bulgaria”.

Another city affected by the Solun events, of course, was Veles, home of the Gemidzhii. After finding out that the majority of the Gemidzhii were from Veles, the Ottoman authorities dispatched Dzhemal- Bey, a member of the Military Court, to investigate. Upon his arrival in Veles, Dzhemal- Bey immediately arrested all the fathers, brothers and other relatives of the Gemidzhii. As was done in other places in Macedonia, people who did not have anything to do with the Organization or the assassins were also arrested. When the fourth shipment of dynamite was sent from Veles to Solun, the name “Gigo Sharlagandzhiata” was mentioned at the train station. This man was a famous manufacturer of “sharlagan” (vegetable oil) in Veles. After the assassinations, he was arrested and detained in prison for several months, even though he had done nothing wrong and had no idea of what the Gemidzhii were up to. The parents and relatives of the Gemidzhii, who knew nothing of what their sons were doing, were also found “guilty”. They were found guilty of giving birth to them and being close to them. They were all condemned. Twenty-three people from Veles were sent to Solun, brought before a military court and sentenced from 3 to 5 years in prison. Among them was Giosho Popiordanov, Ortse’s father.

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We have no accurate figures of how many people were arrested and exposed to torture. According to official information, released by Chief Inspector Hilmi-Pasha to his government, there were 461

prisoners in the Bitola vilayet, 382 in the Solun vilayet and 281 in the Kosovo (Skopje) vilayet, for a total of 1,124 people.

However, as we pointed out earlier about those killed, no one believed the “official” figures for those who were imprisoned, especially since these figures were released by the Ottomans who tended to distort things. (Liberation struggle, doc. 93.) All contemporaries who wrote about these chaotic events agree that the arrests were massive like never before, and the tortures were brutal. The dungeons, which the Ottoman government praised, were not big enough to accommodate all the Macedonians who were arrested and jailed. When the Russian and Austro-Hungarian consuls in Skopje visited one of the prisons, they found it to be overcrowded. As a result, Hilmi-Pasha ordered his people to find and prepare houses where prisoners from this and from two other prisons, could be transferred. (Reports from 1903, 215.) Fontana, the English vice-consul in Skopje, on May 1, 1903, wrote: “The prison in Shtip was overcrowded with 150 people...” (Turkey, No 1 (1904), doc. 250.) The French consul in Solun in his May 7 and 13, 1903 reports to Delkase, pointed out that the prisons were “overcrowded” with arrested Exarchates from all social backgrounds. “The Christians are arrested,” wrote the newspaper ‘Di Informations’ on May 22, 1903, “and imprisoned in the Kan’l-kule prison and the cells in the Edi-Kule prison are full of prisoners. The hands and feet of the prisoners are tied...” (According to N. Silianov, 263.) There were people who went mad from being tortured. The famous revolutionary T. Lazarov was also captured and tortured. Petar Poparsov was brought in chains to a Skopje prison. Ivan Garvanov was also arrested. Almost all major merchants of Macedonian decent belonging to the Exarchate Church in Solun were arrested and jailed. The situation was no different in other parts of Macedonia. About 900 people were arrested in the Solun vilayet, around 850 were arrested in the Bitola vilayet and around 500 were arrested in the Skopje (Kosovo) vilayet. More than 2,200 Macedonians were arrested in total. The arrests lasted more than a month.

Using the Solun assassinations as an excuse for the mass arrests, Hilmi-Pasha was not interested or in a hurry to open the prison doors and release the Macedonians who he knew had nothing to do with the assassinations. But, especially after receiving constant news

that the conflicts between the Ottoman army and the Macedonian cheti kept escalating and that the preparations for a general uprising were intensifying, he knew that a large number of the prisoners he held were connected to the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, even though he did not have any concrete evidence to send them to trial. So he kept them in the prisons. Of all those arrested in Skopje, 110 people were deemed “very suspicious”. Hilmi-Pasha often said: “He is a very dangerous person,” as he pointed to a prisoner. Of course for him, all the teachers and all the prominent Christian citizens were dangerous to his Empire. He considered all the teachers to be the chief leaders and the business people the material supporters of the revolutionary movement in Macedonia. While the surviving the Gemidzhii were still being tried, Hilmi-Pasha had no problem keeping a large number of Macedonian people in his prisons; and he did exactly that. The Ottoman authorities could not have possibly known in the beginning that the Gemidzhii were a very small group of conspirators. They could not even prove or disprove if there was any relationship between the MRO and the Gemidzhii. The general public too did not know about this but was expecting something to be revealed during the trials, something perhaps critical against the sultan. “The trials,” wrote Steg, “will bring bitter disappointment to those who expect that after more than a month, interesting details will be discovered about the link between the authors of the latest assassinations and the revolutionary committees. Indeed, it was said at the outset that members of the subversive committee from Sofia decided to commit a series of assassinations in Solun, but no evidence was given in that sense, so the verdict restricts the conclusion, which is quite sure and complete, for the personal participation of the defendants in the assassinations of April 28 and 29, 1903”. (A.M., F. 238, French Consulate in Solun to Delkase, Solun, June 12, 1903.)

But when claims, counter-claims and allegations could not be proven, especially to the Great Power representatives, the Russian and Austro-Hungarian MPs stepped in and pressured the Ottoman authorities to release a larger number of those arrested. Those prisoners who Hilmi-Pasha suspected of being members of MRO, but had no proof, he was planning to “relocate” without a trial. According to Fontana, Himli-Pasha planned to relocate over 100 “suspected” persons to other parts of the Ottoman Empire, perhaps

near the sea coast where they would be given land and kept under control. (Turkey, No 1 (1904), Doc. 136.) This, however, did not go well with the people and was met with disapproval from the “most interested” consuls in Skopje, the Russian and Austro-Hungarian consuls. The consuls insisted that Hilmi-Pasha publicly try or release the prisoners. The Russian Consul General in Solun, on orders from his ambassador in Tsari Grad, took a trip to Skopje and advised Hilmi-Pasha to instruct the Valis to give up their intentions of expelling suspects without a trial. Hilmi-Pasha unfortunately decided to ignore that advice. (A.M., F. 238, French Consulate in Solun to Delkase, Solun, June 12, 1903.)

The Ottoman authorities decided to use the Solun assassinations as an excuse to expel as many Macedonian people as possible, especially from Solun, while claiming that the entire Macedonian population was “morally responsible” for the actions of a few. As a result a massive number of people, particularly those who had moved to Solun in the recent past, were moved. The prisoners released were forced to go back to their native lands which they had abandoned a long time ago. This created a serious problem for the people. Their families were left without breadwinners and exposed to hunger. The men who were jailed and then expelled were also left with nothing to do, and they too were exposed to hunger. “My colleagues and I,” wrote Steg, “paid particular attention to the danger of being threatened by the loss of earnings for people who dealt in certain professions here, who, after losing their jobs in their villages, would increase the numbers of the rebels...”

By the beginning of July, 1903, about 200 people were forcibly expelled from Solun and sent to their native places. At the same time, about 600 people were released from the Solun prisons. At the end of June there were about 600 people in the prisons in the three vilayets. There were 250 people in the Skopje prison on July 2, of whom 35 were sent to prison outside of Macedonia. (Turkey, No 1 (1904), doc. 70, 74, 89, 127. According to Evgeniadis, in the first ten days there were 500-600 prisoners in the Solun prison - Makedonika, 81.)

Initially, the Ottoman authorities in Solun arrested everyone who was Macedonian including the Macedonian Patriarchates. As a



result Evgeniadis, the Greek consul, sent a list to the Foreign Minister of Greece, from which 24 Macedonian people were identified as Patriarchate. After a Greek intervention, the Patriarchates or so-called “Greeks”, as identified by the Greek government, were released. In critical situations the Ottoman authorities did not care to distinguish between Christians, regardless of their church affiliation. To them they were all equally dangerous. The Ottomans were well aware that, despite the hostility of official Greece to the High Port, the Christian population in Macedonia, as recognized by the Patriarchate Church, was just as dissatisfied with Ottoman rule as was the population recognized by the Exarchate Church. During the first attack by the army and “Bashibozuks” in Solun, 12 Patriarchates, almost all Greeks, were killed in addition to the large number of Exarchates. (Makedonika, 68, 70-71.)

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Impacted by the repressions in Solun, as well as in other cities, was also the prominent layer of Macedonians from the Exarchate camp, who in reality had nothing to do with the Gemidzhii and with the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. “One can believe,” wrote Steg, “that, worried about their own interests, a great number of them were purposely keeping away from direct involvement in the revolutionary movement. However, the Ottoman authorities did not think so... thus openly claiming that every Exarchate was guilty of compassion, at least morally, for the revolutionaries and for the assassins. The next day, after the assassinations, the police began to search and seize the documents of many of the Solun merchants. More than 30 owners of commercial houses, some of which were very large, were detained pending an investigation. The authorities were looking to find anything that did not match between the materials they actually possessed and those shown in their documents. The police were flooded with trade documents it had seized during the searches. The consuls were concerned that this investigation could continue for a long time which would negatively impact their businesses and their obligations to their European traders.

The consequences of the economic life in Solun was quickly felt everywhere. Police measures to block any movement after 8 pm, in

addition to arresting curfew breakers, also impacted the economy. Distrust spread everywhere especially since it was not known who was going to be dragged into the abyss if there was a collapse in trade with the major Macedonian merchants. In Solun, it was customary to pay for goods in cash on the first Friday after the transaction. But the moment the city was disrupted everyone was asking to be paid up front in gold or silver.

The city tram company lost 300 francs a day. The gas company was unable to collect revenues and pay its staff. Almost all transport companies were losing customers. Income from use of the Solun port fell sharply. (AM, F. 238 French Consulate in Solun to Delkase, Solun, May 27, 1903.)

The European colony in Solun was pressed by fear that new assassinations might be carried out in retribution for the repressions brought on by the Muslims and Solun Jews. Both the Muslims and Jews believed that it was “European tolerance” of the revolutionaries that gave the Gemidzhii the courage to carry out the assassinations. The Solun authorities made statements claiming that Solun and the other Vilayets were now peaceful as a result of the mass arrests they had carried out. Unfortunately there was news coming from everywhere contradicting the authorities about how peaceful Macedonia was.

There was terrible stagnation in the economy not just in Solun but everywhere in Macedonia. The same situation found in Solun was also found in Bitola. Although the city was ruled by peace, economic activities in mid-May were at a complete standstill. The authorities tried to open the market but without success. On May 12, 1903 only one quarter of the stores were open. Apart from several Muslims, no other villagers came to Bitola on market day on May 11. The situation began to change somewhat starting on May 12. “Fear and concern had overcome the Christians, not from the Committee (MRO), but from the Muslims...” (Reports from 1903, 220.) Fear and mistrust were so great that they were the biggest reason why the population was hiding in its homes. Fear and mistrust were the greatest cause for stopping traffic everywhere and forcing the marketplace to close down. Tossing spoiled goods into the Dragor River became an everyday event in those days. Even a

rolling tin can in the moving water of the Dragor was reason for fear. Two Jews walking close by were frightened into thinking bombs were exploding in the distance, which gave them reason to flee the city and spread inaccurate news. Half an hour later there was no one in the Bazaar.

Crafts and trades ceased to function in Bitola. Even the usual villagers did not come to the city to buy and sell goods. An atmosphere of fear and uncertainty was maintained by the constant rumours being spread that there was an imminent attack coming from the MRO; and that bombs were exploding here and there; and that the Muslims are preparing to commit another massacre; and so on. The Christian population was looking forward to something “big” happening; freedom from Ottoman oppression. Much of the rumours and misinformation about alleged attacks from MRO seemed to be spread around by interested Muslim circles. Here is what was written about alleged events having taken place on May 6, 1903 in the official “Monastir” newspaper on May 13, 1903: “Last Wednesday some rebels, intending to provoke riots in various parts of the city, began to shoot at the Ottoman military and the Muslim population. Thanks to the rapid intervention of the army and the gendarmerie, these rebel intentions were cut short and peace and order was immediately restored. Several rebels were killed, and several Muslim and non-Muslims were wounded. Under the powerful protection of H.M. the Sultan, the city is now ruled by complete peace and order, every inhabitant does his work and does not cease to pray for the long and happy life of our supreme Master Sultan Hamid-Khan.” (Ibid, 221-222.)

These kinds of stories, written in the Ottoman newspapers, M. Ristich, the Serbian consul, called lies and fabrications. This same lie was sent to Hilmi-Pasha in Skopje by the Bitola Vali. It also appeared at the High Porte in Tsari Grad.

This is how M. Ristich summarized the atmosphere while writing about the truly difficult economic and psychological situation in which almost the entire Christian population had found itself in Bitola: “The Christian population lives with permanent expectation that something will happen which, once and for all, will force an end to this unbearable situation. This common danger from the Muslims

has brought the Christian people closer together and away from their national differences instigated by propaganda which, no doubt, the Committee will take advantage of and will attract more Christians. The feeling that this situation can no longer be endured and that some way must be found to get out of it, the general hatred for the Muslims, has forced the entire Christian population to accept those who will now help it and those who show deeds that want to help it... I have repeatedly pointed out the possibility that the time will come when the Committee, with its work, will fully respond to the feelings of all the local Christian people. It will receive their sympathies and become master of the situation..." (Ibid, 221.)

## **ECHOES OF THE ASSASSINATIONS ABROAD**

European diplomacy and the European public which followed the revolutionary events taking place in Macedonia, to some extent, did pay some attention and somewhat showed some concern. Many of the European newspapers had regular columns in which, often in general terms, they informed their readers about what was happening in this part of the Balkans. Diplomats and the public were accustomed to reading about the armed conflicts, the robberies, the arrests, the harassments, the terror against the Christian population, the uncontrolled exploitation of the disadvantaged, and so on. And, despite the strong campaign led by the Ottomans and the Kingdom of Greece against the revolutionary movement, a large part of the public, especially from the progressive orientation in England, France, Italy, Russia and Austria, understood the plight of the Macedonian people and sympathized with them. They believed the Macedonian people were leading a struggle against the Ottoman Sultanate. Unfortunately, the same world public found it difficult to understand the Solun assassinations. The public in Europe was not only surprised but, more precisely, amazed by the assassinations. Even though the wider general public had been warned by these publications that "something" was being prepared in Solun and in other Macedonian cities, no one expected that the Macedonian revolutionaries would be angry enough to take direct action against European interests. "As for the impression that the news has caused on the political circles here, it is horrible," wrote Ivan Geshov, a Bulgarian representative in Tsari Grad. "Almost all foreign officials

condemned these terrorist acts and, without hesitation, qualified them as anarchist...” (According to H. Srdianov, 267.)

The press took a similar attitude towards the Solun assassinations, particularly the pro-Ottoman German press. One German newspaper wrote: “If all of Macedonia died it would not have caused as much noise and outcry in Europe as was caused by the bombing of the ‘Guadalquivir’...”

Let us emphasize here that, except for a few people who were wounded in the bombing of the ship, there were no human victims. No one died!

Some newspapers, however, after the initial excitement and discontent had died down, came down to earth and began to reflect on the Solun events. Bearing in mind the “insanity”, heroism and self-sacrifice of the Gemidzhii, they began to look for the real reasons why these actions had taken place. After the attacks, in time, after the results of these actions became clearer, the picture, despite the contradictory news, began to change and the truth of what had really happened began to come out. Human and professional ethics began to take over and search for the real reasons why this happened. Unfortunately there were only a few publications that took this road, among them was the “Times”. The aforementioned “Di Information” wrote:

“The dynamite actions in Solun will be met with condemnation throughout the civilized world and will hurt more than help to liberate Macedonia. However, no matter how much it is necessary to condemn this offense, it should not be forgotten that we are talking about a people brought to despair by unbearable oppression. It is not necessary, of course, for dynamite bombs to be thrown in the streets of a large populated city, but whoever was doing this, was doing it to defend himself the best way he could. The dynamite actions should be condemned, but no less should the Ottoman government be also condemned...” (Ibid, 268.)

There were also people out there who knew the source of the real root of evil. They saw the suicide acts as normal and respected them. Victor Berar, a French scientist, a Balkan expert and an expert on

the Ottoman Empire, a glowing protector of the Macedonian cause and the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, supporter of the Macedonian revolutionary struggle, raised his voice boldly in favour of the Gemidzhii by calling their actions heroic.

“...The Solun hurlers of dynamite are proudly reminding the world that Macedonians know how to die for their country. We again hear prominent publishers, government ministers and politicians shouting with one voice saying that this is madness and cruel behaviour and that these bandits forever have discredited their own Macedonian cause.

According to these newspapers and prominent politicians: events in Solun were investigated and a verdict was pronounced: The Macedonians were found to be criminals, Jacobins and murderers! They carry the ‘revolutionary mark’ or, as we call them today, they are anarchists. But the way I see it, their dynamite hurlers deserve to be called everything that Canaris and Miaoulis were called in 1825. (Heroes of the Greek Uprising against the Ottomans.) And even more... There are no apologies for them (Gemidzhii) as there were for the Greeks because they... are not descendants of the Marathon heroes. They only find examples of centuries of obedience, slavery and gratitude in the life of their ancestors. Just 50 years ago their grandfathers believed that they were honoured if they could take what the Ottomans would leave for them, and their grandmothers would be dishonoured by the most worthless aga (squire)...

A terrible and ruthless massacre of people has been committed in Solun (by the Muslims). Yet there is no justice and protest against it or any position taken to remedy it. And I, who know the price of blood, feel pain and anguish and sympathize with the Macedonians more than any other... If there is a principle, which I follow the most and which I support – it’s the old adage of the English liberals: ‘Nowhere is force a cure.’ But I direct my grudge against the true authors of the assassination, towards those who have been for 50 years pushing the Macedonian people towards that dead end. As for the perpetrators of the assassination, I cannot erase my belief that they, bearing bombs, knew that they were going to die. Without bloodguilt, they shed blood on others, they shed blood without scruples, but they did not hesitate to give up their own blood. Their

crime may be irreparable – but their courage is undoubtedly heroic!” (La Revue de Paris, vol. 12, 15. VI 1903. Berar for the Macedonians, “Nova Makedonija”, December 15 and 20, 1972.)

The noble Sister Pisi, who sincerely and wholeheartedly sympathized with the people who experienced the horrors in Solun, on May 7, 1903, wrote: “...The French freely forgave the assassins for attacking the ‘Guadalquivir’, as they increasingly understand the non-deliberate intention of the young fanatics. The French people increasingly perceive the unsustainable situation in Macedonia and are unanimously on their side. Our newspapers, which we regularly receive, are filled with protests against the destruction of the innocent and stubborn Macedonian population...”

The statesmen of Europe, more or less, knew what Victor Berar and other intellectuals knew about the Macedonian situation under the Ottoman yoke. However, state and party interests were placed before the wellbeing of the Macedonian people and therefore the crisis that was a result of supporting those interests was ignored. Their self-interests would not allow them to see the Solun assassination any differently than acts of anarchism. Like the Ottoman government, which used the assassinations as an occasion to brutalize everything that was stirred up in the ranks of the Macedonian people, the Great Powers too used the Gemidzhii actions to compromise the Revolutionary Organization and justify their passive behaviour towards the severe suppression of the Macedonian movement. By siding with the bloody Sultan, the Great Powers allowed the Ilinden Uprising to fail. This is particularly true for England and France, whose attitude towards the Macedonian movement was somewhat different from the purely hostile attitude of Germany, as well as Russia and Austria-Hungary. Delkase, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, best of all knew very well who the Gemidzhii were, why they committed the assassinations and what their relationship was with the Organization (MRO). But, after knowing all that, he still insisted that the assassins were part of the Organization and allowed the cruel attacks to take place against the innocent and peaceful Macedonian population. “Let us talk about the acts committed by dynamite. With the explosion of the ‘Guadalquivir’ in Solun we were the first to experience the new method of getting sympathy; we were the first to suffer, though we

did not hide our sympathies. Then came the bombing of the Ottoman bank... And how-so, to avenge their foes - the Ottomans! The insurgents repeatedly directed their acts against the Europeans... With those acts, the insurgents, who from the beginning gained general sympathy, gradually lost that sympathy... Even the governments at first sympathized with their cause, but that sympathy faded after the assassinations took place. All the European governments were in agreement that renewal of peace and order was needed and advised the Ottoman government to act before the entire region degenerated into anarchism. The rebels did not attack the Ottomans who were in fact their oppressors, but they decided to attack our ship and other things, almost exclusively non-Ottoman, and innocent people. By doing this, perhaps, the insurgents thought they were challenging the European cabinets to interfere in European Turkey in their favour? European cabinets, which would have eventually interfered if there was an uprising, by the nature of the uprising, as history knows, could not have taken the side of the dynamite hurlers..." (Liberation struggle, doc. 155.)

Delkase used "big" words at the expense of the Organization and to detriment of the Gemidzhii. Initially his rhetoric was quite unjustified and later it was filled with irony and sarcasm. It is difficult to believe that the Solun actions of a few could influence entire governments to not only lose sympathy for the Macedonian movement (France, England, and perhaps Italy) but to demand the Ottoman government to put a quick end to the struggle of a suppressed nation. But, contrary to what Delkase said, public opinion about events in Macedonia and the Christian situation in the Ottoman state was not only sympathetic to the Macedonians but also critical of the government policies towards the Macedonian Question. We should add at this point that the revolutionary movement did not truly earn the criticism it received. Delkase was biased against the Macedonians and did not hide his bias or his fears.

The news of the Solun assassinations was not well-received by pro-Ottoman Germany. The German government regarded the assassins as dangerous, pro-Bulgarian and the cause of the crisis in Macedonia. The German government took the Sultan's side regarding the February reforms which, according to the Great Power



governments, were expected to aid the Christian population and neutralize the revolutionary movement in Macedonia. The German government argued that the reason why the reforms could not be realized was not because the High Port was at fault, but that the blame should have been placed on Bulgaria and indirectly on Russia. At one time the German government supported the reforms proposed by Russia and in that sense pressured the Sultan to accept them. However, now it could not support them because “how could the Ottoman government implement such reforms with this campaign of violence that the Bulgarians have instigated?” The Germans argued that the Ottoman government should not be required to implement reforms under these conditions. But later, after the Solun events, when the cheti began to be complemented with “Bulgarian dynamite hurlers”, the diplomatic action for the realization of the reforms proposed by Russia was to begin not in Tsari Grad but in Sofia. This is how the Germans saw the situation in Macedonia after the Solun assassinations. “The leaders of the military party” in Sofia, according to German beliefs, were inspired by Mahbetev, the Russian consul. His very presence in Bulgaria was enough to “encourage the dynamite hurling party” to act. According to German beliefs, it was well-known where the dynamite was manufactured... and that place was none other than Bulgaria. It was also well-known which route the dynamite took on its way to Macedonia. “But could the Russian representative in Sofia really know all this?” they were asking each other at the German Foreign Ministry. If Germany did stand behind the conflict in the Balkan Peninsula, and if it did take part in it at all, it did not do it on the front line and as a result of that it was in a relatively favourable position. If Germany was fighting to keep the peace, it did it because it wanted to help Russia at these critical times!! The only means of deterring a Balkan war, according to the Germans was to put pressure on Bulgaria. But how could Germany do that? Also doing this in Sofia, “where the real fire was burning”, would not yield it the necessary results. This had to be done by Russia, which had far greater influence on the Bulgarian prince. Germany also did not see how putting more pressure on the Sultan could motivate him to produce the desired results. (Die Grosse Politik, 19 Band, Vol. I, Doc. 5541.)

This was the proposed German diplomatic formulation for solving the crisis in Macedonia after the Solun assassinations. Germany fully sympathized with the Sultan and accepted his claim that the revolutionary events taking place in Macedonia were allegedly the work of the Bulgarians, and not a product of the Sultan's system of governance. Through its press, Germany voiced its various assumptions of "its truth" and placed suspicion on Russian policies, accusing Russian diplomacy of creating ambiguity. However, it is well-known that the Russian Tsar had declared himself a friend of the Christian population in Macedonia and was not happy with the Macedonian revolutionary movement. The Russian Tsar had already put pressure on the Bulgarian government, forcing it to tighten and completely close its Bulgarian-Ottoman border and to declare war on the Macedonian revolutionaries. Russian policy towards the Macedonian Question, according to most Bulgarian ruling circles, was publicly and secretly anti-Bulgarian and did not take into account the "San Stefano ideals".

However, it was wrong for Germany to exclude the Sultan's part in the failure of the February reforms. It was also wrong for Germany to blame the Solun assassinations on Bahmetev, the Russian consul in Bulgaria, and on Prince Ferdinand. They had nothing to do with the assassinations.

Outside of the German Kaiser, Sultan Abdul Hamid had another associate, far smaller, but no less faithful. It was the Kingdom of Greece. The Kaiser was a friend of the Sultan but he still approved the proclaimed February reforms, even though the Sultan was against them. The Kingdom of Greece was unreservedly on the side of the Sultan.

It was the same in Greece as it was in Europe, regret for the innocent Gemidzhii bombing victims was expressed, but there was no sympathy or compassion expressed for the innocent victims who fell under the blows of the Ottoman army, police and "Bashibozuks". On the contrary, thinking that it was time to erase all that was revolutionary and Slavic and all who did not serve Greek ambitions for the great Hellas, the competent political factors in Greece decided to stand on the side of the Sultan and offer him help against the "common enemy".

The position of the Greek ruling circles and Greek propaganda against the revolutionary movement in Macedonia did not differ from that of the Ottoman government. It was unfriendly on both sides. This was due to the fact that Greece did not want an autonomous Macedonia - for which the struggle in Macedonia was waged. Despite the fact that the so-called "Greek" population (Patriarchates) in all of Macedonia was no more than 12% of the total population, the Greek ruling circles felt they had the right to all of Macedonia. To prove that they had that "right" they turned to history and to statistics for help (Bulgaria and Serbia did the same). The Greeks used "church affiliation" to prove their right to Macedonia. And, even though most parts of Macedonia were inhabited predominantly by Macedonians with some Vlachs here and there, if these people were affiliated with the Patriarchate Church in Tsari Grad, they were counted as "Greeks". Even if they were not all "Patriarchates" they were all counted as "Greeks". In Kostur Region for example, the Christian population was Macedonian, but most of it was affiliated with the Patriarchate Church. Because of this, the Greek statisticians declared the entire region "Greek". In reality, however, these same people in Kostur were fighting for an autonomous Macedonia. The majority of the people in Kostur Region at that time were members of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Despite the fact that both Greece and the Patriarchate despised the Macedonian revolutionary movement and all the people in it, labeling them "dangerous", they still counted them as "Greeks". They did this because it served their own long-term interests in convincing the world that Macedonia belonged to Greece because the people living in Macedonia were allegedly predominantly "Greek". Therefore, the basic preoccupation of the entire Greek propaganda, led by Athens and Tsari Grad, was to compromise the Organization in front of European diplomacy and in front of the public as an instrument of Bulgarian propaganda in Macedonia. The assassinations in Solun served as an occasion for this.

Greek government interests closely coincided with those of the Ottoman government, which brought the two countries closer together. Greece wanted the Ottomans to stifle the Macedonian revolutionary movement and maintain the status quo, which was

good for Greece and the Ottomans but bad for the Macedonian people. Therefore, the Ottoman authorities took all possible measures against the revolutionary movement in Macedonia, even the kind of measures that caused disgust in the European public, except in the Greek government circles which believed the measures were justified and approved of them.

The Greeks in Solun joined the “Bashibozuk” rabid hoards during the pogrom against the innocent Macedonian population and were responsible for some of the massacres. Greek propaganda, especially the newspaper “Embros”, published in Solun, competed with Ottoman propaganda in attacking and slandering the Macedonian revolutionary movement. The Greeks took every possible measure to convince the Europeans that the Macedonian revolutionary movement was struggling more against the Greeks than it was against the Ottomans. Through their propaganda the Greeks wanted to show that the Solun assassinations were directed against Patriarchate facilities. Of course all their arguments were invented. Evgeniadis, as we said earlier, informed Athens that, according to “reliable information” he had acquired, the conspirators were planning to attack and blow up the Greek Consulate in Solun. To “fend off” the danger he naturally sought help from the local Ottoman commander. In an article published in “Embros”, the Greeks informed the public that the “bombers” had plans to bomb the Greek Consulate, the Greek Metropolitan building and the Greek gymnasium but failed to realize their plans. According to Greek accounts, on May 1, 1903, a young Bulgarian man was caught with a packet of dynamite. According to his “confession” he was sent to blow up the Greek consulate. He was sent to Solun from Sofia only a few days ago to “take part in the movement”. (Makedonika, 62-63.) Of course, all this information was invented. The Gemidzhii never planned to attack any of the Greek institutions or Greek property in the city. And it was only by chance that one Greek was killed during the Solun events.

The propaganda campaign against the Macedonian revolutionary movement inside Greece took unprecedented dimensions. There were hysterical outbursts of hatred against the Macedonian population fighting against the Ottoman government followed by great expressions of unheard of sympathies for the Sultan, greatly

approving the bloody reprisals he took against the innocent Macedonian people. When the innocent Christian population in Bitola was being massacred on May 6, 1903, during the Greek king's name day, the Greek university in Athens was holding a banquet during which the march "Hamidie" was played. The march was not only received with a standing ovation but the Greeks in attendance were yelling "Long live the Sultan!" (How hypocritical!!!) A few days later, a group of Greek officers visited the Ottoman diplomacy in Athens and, on behalf of 1,000 volunteers, asked them to convey their sympathy to the Sultan and their desire to join the Ottoman service and help the Ottoman army in its war against the rebels in Macedonia. Expressing satisfaction with the sympathy given to the Sultan, the Ottoman envoy told them that they were grateful for the offer but that the Ottoman army and police would soon liquidate the "bandits".

These great Greek sympathies and flattery to the same Sultan who committed "bloody" crimes against innocent people, given by Greece, a Christian-Orthodox country, which, only six years ago, had fought bitterly against the army of the same Sultan (the Turkish-Greek War in 1897) caused astonishment in Europe and forced some Helleno-phils to react sharply. V. Berar said, "This convergence between Greece with the Sultan is a real moral fiasco," pointing out that the Greek leaders who were leading this policy would bring shame to Hellenism. With much indignation Berar wrote: "Athens... is under the boot of Ottoman diplomacy. The king, the ministers and the politicians are extremely honoured to receive Abdul Hamid's large cordon... When the Greeks raised a monument in Lamia to commemorate a hero of the Greek independence, the Greeks were careful not to be too enthusiastic about their desire for revenge. If one was listening to their speeches one would have thought that Diakos, Kolokotronis... (heroes of the 1821 Greek uprising against Ottoman bondage) were loyal followers of the Port and faithful servants of the whole... Do the Greeks not understand that from day to day it becomes more difficult to advocate their cause before the civilized world?" (V. Berar, *Pros tus Hellinas*, 1903; *La Revue de Paris*, C. Kn.)

An article was published in the "Di Information" on May 22, 1903, which among other things said, "because of this moral fall of the

Greeks Lord Byron, George Canning... and all other Philhellenes are surely turning in their graves... But they (the Greeks) are causing their own punishment. Deservingly, Abdul expressed his gratitude to those people who offered to help him do his bloody deeds but those making such offers should be ashamed for accepting such gratitude..." (According to H. Silianov, 269.)

The reforms proposed by Russia and Austria-Hungary, in late 1902, caused considerable anxiety among the ruling circles in Greece and in the Phanariot Greeks in Tsari Grad. This fear was a result of Great Power pressure to implement such reforms demanded by the revolutionary events taking place in Macedonia. Greece was reminded of 1875-76-78, when the Slavic speaking peoples stood up against the Ottoman authorities and when, for the most part, they engaged the European powers to correct problems by imposing reforms on the Ottomans. The thinking in Athens was that if the same thing was done now, as a result of the Gemidzhii actions and as a result of the Organization acting up, then the problems in Macedonia could be solved to the detriment of Greek interests. Therefore, official Greece was against any reforms in Macedonia and unconditionally supported the Ottomans in their bloody suppression of the Macedonian movement. Greece was ready to accept reforms, but only those which would guarantee successful development of Greek-patriarchal propaganda and its assimilation policies, as well as those that would enable the Ottoman gendarmerie to effectively wipe out the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Autonomy, for which the Organization was fighting, was not acceptable to Greece because it did not allow for "grabbing" Macedonian territories. Following orders issued by Athens, the Greek organs of the Patriarchate churches and schools in Macedonia became servants of the Ottoman authorities, informing on the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and the Macedonian people. "...By subordinating themselves as instructed by the Greek consul, the Patriarchate clergy in Macedonia," wrote Steg, "played the role of informants... As for me, I do not believe this behaviour will serve the interests of Hellenism..."

The Greek propaganda, as we mentioned, worked very hard to compromise the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization by accusing it of being "the bearer of foreign interests". According to

an article published in the newspaper “Embros” on May 8, 1903, “The goal of the Committee, through its anarchist tremors, plots, uncertainty, and abnormal situation, is to force the Great Powers to send their fleets and take over the city. The Committee hopes that international occupation of Solun would lead to the definitive solution of the Macedonian Question in accordance with Bulgarian wishes...” (Makedonika, 82, note 1.)

While the Greeks paraded themselves as carriers of peace in Tsari Grad and Europe, they had the nerve to rise up and, in the name of freedom and human dignity, demand that the Sultan physically destroy the Macedonians. What is more bizarre than that is that the Greeks expected “understanding” from the Great Powers for their behaviour.

“Let us hope,” wrote Evgeniadis, “that Turkish judges will prove to be merciless to the perpetrators and will punish them deservingly and will not delay their execution just like it happens to convicted Committee killers...”

They should do this to serve as an example to others and to also prevent new dangers hanging over the city because, according to some accounts, the assassins, for various reasons, were in a hurry and could not fully fulfill their ‘satanic’ plans...” (Makedonika, 82.) The Greek consul believed that, for some reason, the assassins had started their actions prematurely which resulted in failure. According to the Greek consul, if all the Christians were to be slaughtered, a great deal of damage would be done to the Greeks because it would cause European intervention, which with the “crimes”, “the movement” would achieve its objectives which would not be in the interest of the Greeks.

## **PROSECUTION AND IMPRISONMENT OF THE GEMIDZHII**

As mentioned earlier, initially the “explosion” in the “Guadalquivir” was attributed to boilers exploding which created doubts about the possibility of sabotage. And because the French too appeared to have doubts that it was sabotage, the Ottoman authorities, it seems, also had their own doubts. Otherwise, how does one explain why all

the passengers from the ship were allowed to leave and go wherever they wanted before the investigation was completed? If sabotage was expected the investigation of the explosion on the “Guadalquivir” would have been started immediately before the passengers were allowed to leave.

In the French hospital, where the ship’s crew was located, there were several wounded people. The medical staff immediately noticed that the wounded sailors had no signs of vapour burns, which would have been normal with a boiler explosion.

In the morning of April 29, 1903, the hospital was visited by the ship’s captain who spent a long time talking with the chief mechanic, who was wounded, about the causes of the explosion, of the possibility of it being sabotage and who may have done such a thing? In their discussions they managed to identify a suspicious person. He was dressed in out of style European clothing which would seem ridiculous to a European. He looked like an out of touch merchant who belonged to a different time. What made him even more suspicious was that he loitered near the engine room for no apparent reason. Then just before the explosion took place, he was seen carrying a suitcase (with the dynamite package) everywhere he went, appearing like he did not want to let it go. As soon as the captain found this out he informed the authorities. (From Sister Pisi’s diary, “Nova Makedonija”, January 9, 1961.) After the information collection phase of the investigation was completed it was discovered that the suspect was a “Bulgarian” man who, after spending the night at hotel “Parthenon”, left for Skopje by train. Failing to pick up his suitcase was also a strong motive for suspecting him. An arrest warrant was issued for his detention in Skopje.

In the meantime Shatev, as Georgi Manasov, the man they were looking for, was on his way to “Vranie”. When he boarded the “Guadalquivir” in Solun the destination on his passport showed him going to Varna. Now, traveling to Skopje, he was hoping that the authorities could misinterpret “Varna” for “Vranie”. And indeed, the first police check conducted between Krivolak and Veles did not pick up on the “mistake”. However, the arrest order for him was in



Skopje and, as soon as Shatev arrived, he was detained. He was then put on another train, coming from Zibevche, and sent back to Solun.

During the night of April 29, 1903, as the train began to approach Solun, the passengers noticed there were no lights on in the city. No one knew why except for one passenger and that passenger was Shatev. The huge train station was illuminated with 4 or 5 lanterns. Meanwhile the entire city was sunk in darkness. The only place illuminated brightly was the burning Ottoman bank, generating large flames trying to illuminate the Macedonian capital and the entire country. From time to time there were bombs exploding in response to rifle fire. Less than a dozen Macedonian heroes were fighting against an entire empire, here in the heart of the Balkans.

Shatev and several other detainees were transferred under guard to the Vilayet Administration. Even before dawn the yard was bursting with prisoners as they continuously arrived in the yard of the building. The Ottoman army and police had begun its bloody crackdown on the innocent Macedonian population. Shatev became fully aware of the consequences of his actions. "I never assumed that destiny would put me in the middle of such a tragedy. I was one of the culprits responsible for the assassinations... Not the multitude on innocent people. I felt sorrow, anger and pain but I could do nothing. I could not help anyone. Now I had to live with what I had done. But as I pondered this fact, I realized that the innocent would suffer more than the guilty. This is how it was in this part of the world when one fought for their cause." (P. Shatev, 380.)

On April 30, 1903 at daybreak, Shatev was taken to see Vali Hasan Fehmi-Pasha.

"Were you a passenger on the 'Guadalquivir'?" asked the Vali. "Yes!" replied Shatev. He was then imprisoned and was not interrogated until May 6, 1903. (On May 1, 1903, Sister Pisi wrote that the person suspected of blowing up the ship was put in prison. She wrote according to what she heard from the authorities that he had allegedly said that the aim of the assassins was not only to prompt France to intervene before the Great Powers and before the Ottomans in their (Gemidzhii) favour, but to also attract the authorities towards the port by blowing up the ship and then,

without any obstacles and without many human victims, carry out the rest of the plan. Shatev, however, did not mention having made such a statement or of such a plan.)

Pavel Shatev was the first of the Gemidzhii to be arrested. So the question that arises from this is: “Why is it that Shatev, who was against giving up his life during his first mission, allowed himself to be arrested and sentenced to death?” He himself did not answer this question. It was not like he could not have avoided capture. Even though his train ticket was for Skopje, as his final destination, the train did stop at a number of other stations before Skopje. He himself admits that he could have got off at Veles but was afraid that, as a foreign subject, i.e. as Georgi Manasov from Bulgaria, he could have given the police reason to follow him and was afraid of putting his comrades in Veles at risk. However there was another reason, an important reason why he did not try to escape, which was: “according to existing relations with the people in the local Committee, he was not allowed to ask for assistance to escape to Bulgaria. (P. Shatev, 372-373.)

A few days later Bogdanov and Arsov were arrested. After that Marko Boshnakov – “the grocer” was arrested. Boshnakov’s arrest was as a result of betrayal. A man named Naum who knew Boshnakov was walking outside the Catholic Church in the late afternoon of Friday May 15, 1903 and accidentally ran into a man named Stefan, a known informer. The two men knew each other from before. So to avoid suspicion as to why he was there, Naum told Stefan that he was looking for shelter because it was nearly curfew time and he did not have enough time to get home. As it turned out Stefan gave Naum shelter until the next morning. In “gratitude” Naum, in return, opened up to Stefan and told him where Marko Boshnakov – “the grocer” was hiding. He told him that Marko was hiding in his brother’s house. His brother was an administrator in the Exarchate gymnasium. Without hesitation, the next morning Stefan went straight to the Vali and told him where Boshnakov was hiding but when the police arrived at the house he was not there. Naum, determined to become a famous snitch, went to Stefan’s house on Sunday and told Stefan that the police did not find Boshnakov because he was well hidden and that the police should try again. The same day both Stefan and Naum personally

went to the Vali's private home to get permission to dispatch the police. The Vali agreed and the search was to be conducted the same day in the afternoon. After the two men left they went directly to the police station but waited for a long time because none of the policemen seemed to be interested in the case. Stefan decided to address the head of the police department directly and got his attention. A search was carried out on May 18, 1903, during which they captured and arrested Marko Boshnakov – “the grocer”. (A. M., F. 238 - French Consulate in Solun, May 27, 1903 - annex-statement made by Stefan, administrator in the Catholic Church, after Marko was arrested.) It is worth mentioning at this point that Naum lived in the same house together with Marko and his brother Hristo!

Marko Boshnakov's arrest was declared an extraordinary event. The public had already been informed of his role in the assassinations and his detention was a breath of fresh air for the authorities and especially for the police. The same day that he was arrested the “Solun Dnevnik”, with great pleasure, published some details of his arrest. The newspaper showed its gratitude to the police for their brave act and, of course, said nothing about “the snitch” or “snitches” who sold him out. The police also said that Marko Boshnakov was a member of the “Macedonian-Bulgarian Revolutionary Committee” and an “anarchist”. Until then Marko's origin had been disputed. Some thought he was a Vlach, but now the authorities were certain that he was from Ohrid. His brother Hristo was also arrested along with Marko.

The newspaper also gave details about the other Gemidzhii who, according to this story, were nine. Milan and Bogdan (Georgi Bogdanov) were captured alive. The other five who did not want to surrender “fell from gendarme bullets”, while Iovan Konstantin (Kosta Kirkov) received “two good bullets” in his chest at the very moment he tried to get into the postal station using the rain as cover, in order to “blow it up”. Apart from five dynamite bombs that the authorities found on him they also found various documents, many of which, it was alleged, belonged to the Revolutionary Committee. (Ibid, annex “Solun Dnevnik”, May 18 and 20, 1903.)

The purpose of this publication was very clear. The article was written with intent to emphasize, one, the “courage” and “bravery”

of the military and the police which allegedly managed to liquidate the assassins in a professional manner, and two, to identify the assassins as supposedly belonging to the “Macedonian-Bulgarian Committee” to hide the fact that they were Macedonian heroes fighting for the Macedonian cause. The supposed documents they found on Kirkov were a fabrication to convince the domestic and foreign public that the Gemidzhii were members of the “Committees” and that they had a relationship with Bulgaria. They tried to prove this through the courts but without success.

In order to further vilify the Gemidzhii, the Ottoman authorities began to release information that the Gemidzhii were allegedly planning to blow up the entire European district, but fortunately that did not happen because all of the dynamite placed in the tunnel did not explode. (The authorities, it seems, received this information from either Naum or Stefan. Naum had informed the authorities that he and Hristo, Marko’s brother, helped remove soil from the tunnel and deposit it at various places in the city. According to Naum the tunnel was supposed to be much longer than it was. It was supposed to span across the entire European quarter. However, due to the repair done to the sewers by the city workers, the operation was accelerated and there was not enough time to complete it as originally planned. But as we well know from the Gemidzhii themselves, the tunnel was dug to only blow up the Ottoman Bank and not to destroy the houses of innocent people.)

Marko Boshnakov was arrested two weeks after the military court began its work. Several people had already gone through the legal process before him, including the other four Gemidzhii. Their trial was quite interesting but was not open to the public. It was conducted in secret. This placed doubt in people’s minds regarding the objectivity of the trials and the investigations. However, having sufficient and indisputable evidence, the High Port decided to organize a trial that should have been envisioned by courts with centuries-old democratic tradition. In parallel with filling the prisons in almost all of Macedonia and by using well-known investigative torture against the entire Macedonian population (with special expeditions sent to rob and burn down Macedonian villages, and the like), a special trial was prepared in Solun which, according to official Tsari Grad, was a showcase for European consumption.

While prosecuting the Gemidzhii, it was the wish of the Ottoman authorities to prosecute the entire Macedonian liberation movement and the entire Macedonian nation. However, as we will later see, this would remain only a wish.

In his memoirs Shatev has written brief descriptions of the torture and cruelty perpetrated against the prisoners by the Ottoman authorities, but has written hardly anything about his own experience and that of the other Gemidzhii. It almost seems like he enjoyed some special humane treatment. He said he himself was not tortured but there is information that shows that the Gemidzhii were indeed tortured.

“Today I got permission,” wrote Sister Pisi on May 21, 1903, “to visit the prisoners from Kukush, to give them medical help... Edip-Pasha also allowed me to visit other sick people and help them if they needed help. Beaz-kule (Bela-kula (White Tower)) - a parody of its name. It is dreadful for me to think about this terrible cave which sows horrible death everywhere. I encountered people being beaten everywhere. Some were beating their own heads against the wall hoping for a quick death.

There are four assassins in the prison, all locked up in separate cells. As the trial is nearing, which is proclaimed to be open to the public, the regime is acting quite milder... I saw the assassin who blew up our ship. He did not have the mark on his face of which the captain of the ship spoke. His right eye was quite swollen. I placed a cold compress on it and asked him, in French, so that the guards could not understand: ‘For God’s sake why did you turn against the French when we did nothing to you?’ He moved slightly and said: ‘It was my mission! The French people are rich and will build a new ship. But they will always remember that there exists a small enslaved nation seeking its freedom!’

The fourth assassin is in very bad shape. His face is so badly beaten one cannot recognize him. He looks like a bloody mess and is constantly unconscious...

I could not go any further, I wanted to leave this horrible place and go as far away as possible. I went and saw Edip-Pasha, as he was the

president of the court, and informed him of the terrible conditions in the prison, especially with the sick prisoners, and asked him to make improvements. He cynically said: ‘We don’t care; it’s the same to us if they are healthy or sick!’...” (From Sister Pisi’s diary, “Nova Makedonija”, January 12, 1961.)

On May 6, 1903, Georgi Manasov (Shatev) was brought into a large room in which, along with several senior officers led by Edip-Pasha, President of the Military Court, there were also two civilians. The civilians were Steg, the French consul and another man who was a director of the “Masagheri Martim” shipping agency. The world press had reported that the perpetrator who blew up the “Guadalquivir” was Georgi Manasov, a young Bulgarian man from Kiustendil.

“What is your name and where are you from?” was the first question Edip-Pasha asked.

“My name is Georgi Manasov and I was born in Kiustendil,” replied Shatev.

“Do you know what happened in the city? And were you a passenger in the ship that burned down a week ago?” was the next question.

“Yes! I know that a ship burned down and it seems like you are accusing me of burning it down. But since the damage was done under a French flag, i.e. in French territory, then I should be standing in a French court in front of a French judge and only then will I tell what I know.”

Edip-Pasha accepted his comment with impudence but because there were Frenchmen in his presence he decided not to react negatively.

In the same room was also Shatev’s suitcase which he had left behind on the ship. The ship’s agency had recovered it, examined it in front of Shatev and handed it over to the judicial authorities.

After this first short interrogation, Shatev was interrogated almost every day for the next two weeks. The main interrogator was Major

Zhemal-Bey. During the entire investigative process Shatev maintained that his name was Georgi Manasov and that he was originally from Kiustendil. He admitted to having committed the crime but the authorities, as we pointed out earlier, wanted to try him in a public trial. It was not enough for them to just confess to the crime, they wanted facts, details and witnesses to conclude that Shatev in fact was responsible, without any doubt, of destroying the ship. The court, of course, also wanted, at any cost, to reveal the true identity of the defendant: that his real name was Pavel Shatev, that he was from Kratovo and that he was an Ottoman subject. For that purpose the authorities brought in Ivan Garvanov to identify him. Garvanov had been Shatev's professor for many years. Garvanov confirmed that he was indeed Pavel Shatev, but Shatev insisted that Garvanov was wrong and that he was probably lying. Professor Edhem-Efendi was also brought in. The professor claimed he knew Shatev because some time ago he had done some translating in Turkish for him. Shatev immediately denied that he knew the Turkish language. He insisted he was from Kiustendil and that he knew only Bulgarian and French.

“He speaks Turkish?” asked the president (chief interrogator).

“The good-natured and compassionate Professor Edhem-Efendi,” wrote Shatev, “in a manner to apologize to me, turned to the president and said: ‘I remember well that as a Turkish language student he was a very weak student.’...”

At the end, in order to prove that Georgi Manasov was actually Pavel Shatev, a comparison of his handwriting was done. They looked at his handwritten confession and compared it to Shatev's handwritten assignments from when he was a student. But that too was in vain as he stubbornly refused to admit that he was Pavel Shatev. Even though the Court had all the necessary arguments to prove Shatev's identity, his stubborn posture and defiance, if he did that in court, would raise doubts.

“This man is not a Bulgarian from Kiustandil,” wrote Steg Delkase, “as I was telegraphed from the Embassy (in Tsari Grad), but a Macedonian from Kratovo... He is called Pavel Shatev and is a former student of the Solun Gymnasium. After all, even though he

was recognized by the director of the gymnasium and his old classmates, he continued to claim that he is Georgi Manasov, whose name is on his passport.” (A.M., f. 238, French Consulate in Solun, May 13, 1903.)

During the investigation the court was particularly interested in discovering two very important things: 1) a link between the assassins and Bulgaria and, 2) their connection to the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. The authorities assumed or, more precisely, wanted to assume that the assassins were sent from Bulgaria, perhaps from one of its ministries, to conduct missions with dynamite according to a plan drawn up in Sofia. Of course there was no such thing and it could not be found. The Gemidzhii were given birth by the terrible conditions in Macedonia and their work was the work of Macedonian revolutionaries. But these facts did not appeal to Edip-Pasha because he did not like the truth.

“Do you belong to some contemporary social school, to some organization, national or social?” asked translator Tefikov.

“I don’t belong to any organization!” replied Shatev.

In other words, if it could not be proven that the assassins were sent from Bulgaria, then it should be proven, at any cost, that they were members of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization or anarchists.

A. Shopov, the Bulgarian trade agent (diplomatic representative) in Solun, “embarrassed” that the “Bulgarians” were accused of carrying out the assassinations, proclaimed to the city that the assassins were not “people’s fighters” but simply socialists and anarchists. “And indeed,” wrote Shatev, “I don’t know who lamented more about the assassinations Hasan Fehmi-Pasha or A. Shopov?” (P. Shatev, 401.)

The Gemidzhii were isolated and without lawyers during the investigations so the process that was followed was very simple. It was hard to explain, however, why Shatev, who gave the investigators a lot of information during the interrogations in the prison, said nothing about the other three. Immediately after the



verdict was pronounced, the authorities placed all four Gemidzhii together in the same prison and after that in exile.

The military court also investigated all the other prisoners. Of course they had nothing to do with the assassins, but at first the authorities did not know that and, in this way, endeavoured to maintain the illusion that a great conspiracy against the Sultan existed in Macedonia.

The High Port decided to arrange a pompous trial for the Gemidzhii. This was done to prove that the Ottoman authorities acted decisively and strictly against the revolutionaries, but at the same time to convince Europe, which consistently pressed for reforms in Macedonia, that the Ottoman judiciary did not differ much from those in “democratic” countries and that its procedures were similar to those employed in the European courts.

There was enormous interest in the trials of the Gemidzhii, particularly in the trials of Pavel Shatev and Marko Boshnakov – the grocer. The authorities informed the public in advance of the days of the public trials but did not inform the defendants. On May 24, 1903 the Gemidzhii were taken out of their cells in Beaz-kule and escorted to the courtroom under heavy guard. On their way to the court building they were surprised to see curious crowds gathering in the streets. There were people around every corner looking to get a glimpse of the Gemidzhii, or to see the nooses where they were going to be hung. The Gemidzhii too believed that they were being taken to be hung. But when they arrived, they were surprised by what they saw inside the same hall where they had been interrogated earlier.

The courtroom was specially prepared for their trial. At the far end of the hall, to the left and right of the centre chair, meant for the President of the court, were two armchairs for the judges, opposite them, a distance of several metres, was the bench for the defendants, to the left of which was the table for the registrar, the translator and one administrator. The other side of the hall was filled with chairs for the numerous “guests” who were invited to observe the trial. This trial was held in public in order for the Ottoman authorities to show their “dignity” and to convince everyone that the Ottoman

legal system was fair. The consular corps, civil and military senior officials from the vilayet, heads of large companies and other Solun public workers were invited for the same reasons. Hikmet-Bey, director of political affairs in the vilayet, responsible for following protocol, welcomed his guests and showed them to their designated seats. Just before 3 pm Hasan Fehmi-Pasha, the Vali, arrived. By then the hall was packed with guests. Hasan Fehmi-Pasha took his seat not far from the presidential armchair. Marshal Hairi-Pasha, the commander of the Third Army, sat next to him.

Present in the courtroom were consular representatives from the various consulates including some from France, England, Serbia, Greece, Romania and one honorary consul from the United States.

At exactly 3 pm everyone in the hall stood up. Edip-Pasha walked into the courtroom first and was followed by the judges. Besides the president, the military court consisted of Rasim-Pasha a senior naval officer, Shaban-Bey an artillery colonel, Omer-Bey a cavalry lieutenant colonel, Izet-Bey an artillery major, Dzhemal-Bey a general headquarters major, Husni-Efendi a clerk and Husein-Efendi a translator. As can be seen, there was an impressive composition of officers in the court.

After the President sat down everyone else also sat down. Edip-Pasha ordered the duty officer to introduce the defendants. Immediately there was a stir in the crowd. All present turned their eyes towards the door. One by one the defendants entered the courtroom, each accompanied by two soldiers.

The bell was rung. There was silence in the courtroom. The president announced, “the court is now in session.”

“I see only three defendants. Where is the fourth? Where is Bogdanov?” the president asked.

“He was prevented from coming!” replied the duty officer.

“Was there a legal justification for that?” asked Edip-Pasha, even though he knew that Bogdanov was wounded and could not attend.

The court clerk read the medical report, which indicated that Bogdanov was in bad shape health-wise and was not permitted by a doctor to attend the trial. (Earlier we saw how shaken nurse Pisi was by Bogdanov's appearance. He, among other things, was wounded in the chest by a guard because he had stuck his hand out of the door window in an attempt to open the door and escape. The door, however, was locked and there was no way Bogdanov could have opened it. It seems that Bogdanov did this because of mental distress.)

Following court formalities, with the court's desire to get to the truth, the court president ordered the court clerk to read the charges. The clerk read: "With aims at changing the form of governance in the Rumeli Vilayets of the Ottoman Empire, members of a subversive Committee, headquartered in Sofia, decided to commit a number of assassinations in the city Solun..., using bombs and dynamite in order to increase the effect of their crimes..." The clerk then read the charges for the known events: "During the night of April 29, 1903, at the time when the city's residents were still gathered in their homes, the 'agitators' attempted to put their plans into action. In order to frighten people and create panic, they first blew up the gas pipelines, leaving the city in the dark and preventing the fires they started from being extinguished because of the absence of fire fighters; Then they threw bombs in front of the post office, in front of the English café, and in the 'Alhambra' garden; They then blew up the Ottoman bank through a tunnel they had dug under its foundations; The day before they set fire to the 'Guadalquivir' steamer; The next day they tried to blow up the telephone bureau..."

The names of the dead Gemidzhii and those who survived and were being judged were read:

Georgi Petre Bogdanov, from Veles, commissioner, 24 years old.

Georgi Manasov, whose real name is Pavel Potsev (Shatev), from Kratovo, 21 years old.

Marko Stoian Bosniak, grocer, from Ohrid, 26 years old.

Milan Arsov, from Veles, a student at the Bulgarian Gymnasium in Solun, 19 years old.

It is interesting that in the testimonies given during the interrogations, which were probably conducted under coercion, some of the defendants, possibly to make it easier for themselves, gave out bogus information that could not be confirmed by other sources. Bogdanov, for example, said that he had been recruited by Ortse, then by Kosta and then by others. He said that he had been approached many times by the Gemidzhii circle but he kept refusing. But eventually he agreed to be recruited. He said the “operations” were led by Dime Mechev who, after trying to kill the famous Veles merchant with an axe, left. He said the dynamite was brought to Solun in barrels of salted fish; everyone participated in digging the tunnel under the bank; 283 kg of dynamite were stored in Marko’s store. Bogdanov told a slightly different story about how the tasks were assigned among the Gemidzhii. According to Bogdanov, Pavel Potsev (Shatev) was expected to attack the customs house and Bogdanov himself was expected to attack the Austro-Hungarian consulate and consular staff and officers who passed by his house. Bogdanov confessed that he did not do any of that because he did not have the courage to do it. Instead he went home and did not take part in any of the assassinations. So, apart from his participation in the digging of the tunnel, Georgi Bogdanov refused to admit that he took part in the dynamite attacks around the city. However, the court gave evidence showing that he was one of the active assassins, namely, at the moment he was arrested (April 30, 1903), he was allegedly found carrying a suitcase full of dynamite. When he was asked by the agent who arrested him if he was the one who threw dynamite on the “Alhambra”, he said:

“Not! Not on the ‘Alhambra’ but on the English tavern, the bank, the bridge and all the other places you want me to tell you that I did!”

This was confirmed later by several agents. The housewife at the house where Georgi Bogdanov was renting a room said that soon after the explosion at “Alhambra” she saw Bogdanov come home all excited. Her son Xenophon Xanthopoulos was astonished when, on Wednesday evening, he saw a hat on Bogdanov’s head instead of a

fez which he regularly wore. Bogdanov was charged with deliberately renting an apartment in this part of the city in order to be close to the “Alhambra”.

In the end, Bogdanov himself reportedly made statements to the military court admitting what he had done. However, at the time he was physically and mentally very ill.

For some unknown reason, Pavel Shatev was tried as if he was of lesser importance even though he was among the most active and famous of the living Gemidzhii. His actions were clear and indisputable. The rationale for this had to do with the question of his identity. Not only did he claim that he was from Kiustendil, he was bringing up other information, biographical data, about himself. For example, he told the interrogators that he had studied in Sofia and in Plovdiv, but he did not pass and could not graduate so he decided to come to Solun. He arrived there on March 19<sup>th</sup>. However, the court had information that he was Pavel Potsev (Potse was his father’s name) and that he was indeed from Kratovo. In addition to that, the court sent a photograph of him to the authorities in Kratovo who interviewed many individuals and confirmed that he was from Kratovo.

Besides his identity, Shatev did not want to hide anything else. The already known facts were repeated over and over again. He even mentions them in his own memoirs. He boarded the “Guadalquivir” as a passenger and 10 minutes before the ship began to move he placed a “huge package” in a hallway between the first-class cabins and the cabin of the crew, near a steam tank. Marko Boshnakov confirmed that on his way to boarding the “Guadalquivir”, Shatev took a “large” amount of dynamite from his store and other explosive and flammable materials. He also confirmed that, before that, Shatev took part in the digging of the tunnel. Milan Arsov said that Potsev was tasked with blowing up the ship. Shatev’s doing on the ship was also confirmed by statements made by the “Guadalquivir” crew during their interviews by the consular authorities and before the court.

It was alleged that Marko Boshnakov came to Solun with Iordan Popiordanov-Ortse and that he was a member of the “subversive

committee” and that his main task was to help members of the Gemidzhii circle carry out “criminal acts”. For this purpose, he rented the store in order to dig a tunnel from the store basement to the bank’s foundation and the “Colombo” hotel with intentions of blowing up the entire district. These facts were confirmed, in part, by Marko himself, in whose store drums of dynamite, electric batteries and various tools for digging were found.

Milan Arsov admitted to everything he had done. He declared that he was a member of the Gemidzhii circle, that he had participated in digging the tunnel, that he had carried bombs with him, etc. Some of these acts were confirmed by Marko Boshnakov.

Because all of their deeds were proven and confirmed and because all four Gemidzhii were members of the “Revolutionary Committee”, which aimed to “kill people and destroy the city”, all four were unanimously found guilty on all charges.

We should mention at this point that there were some inaccuracies mentioned during the trials which the Gemidzhii would not have voluntarily said, which seems to indicate that they were forced by the authorities to say them.

After reading the verdict Edip-Pasha, President of the Court, addressed the defendants as follows:

“You have just heard the verdict proclaiming you guilty of the crimes you have committed in accordance with the penal provisions contained in Art. 54 and 56 and the additional paragraph to Article 58 of the Criminal Code... On the basis of the three articles read here, you, the defendants Georgi P. Bogdanov, Pavel Potsev, Marko Stoian Boshnakov and Milan Arsov are sentenced to death!”

Immediately after the verdict was pronounced the courtroom began to empty. The Vali and the other prominent people in attendance felt it was their duty to congratulate Edip-Pasha and express their “admiration” for running a successful process. “Everyone was literally thrilled” seeing how military judges were able to collect enormous amounts of evidence against those who decided to kill and cause fires.

The judges listened modestly to all the praises and said that they had found fulfillment in their duty.

The spectacular trial was also congratulated by the Ottoman newspaper “Solun Dnevnik” (Solun Daily), which published details of the court proceedings and materials presented. This publication was also a formal way of informing the general public of the Gemidzhii indictments and trials. Steg, as well as the other consuls, even sent copies of this story to their ministries. (A.M., F. 238 - French Consulate in Solun, June 12, 1903 - annex.)

But how was this much anticipated, spectacular trial in Ottoman and European circles seen by the suspects themselves and by the special guests in the selected audience? Here is what Shatev himself wrote:

“When Edip-Pasha, President of the Court, pronounced the sentences with the words ‘sentenced to death’ many people in the audience were not surprised. At that moment, we the convicted looked perfectly calm, even though we were not. There was something more. In response to the wicked smiles I received from some of the civilians (mostly Europeans) present in the room, I deliberately moved my lips to look like I was smiling back at them. Many noticed... Some members of the audience even made comments about the indifference of the three defendants when they heard the verdict. Some of the more curious in the audience thought that we were unusual people. Some even assumed that we would be hurt by the harsh verdict and that we would start crying and begging for mercy. A death sentence for us was far less a punishment than solitary confinement in a prison. A death sentence for us was salvation.” (P. Shatev, 411-412.)

Here is what the newspaper “Solun Dnevnik” wrote about that moment: “The convicts heard the verdict with excitement. They were petrified through the entire trial. Marko Stoian and Milan Arsov began to gasp with convulsions as the judge was reading the law even before the verdict was read. Pavel Potsev looked into the distance with indifference. Perhaps at that very moment he was thinking of the insane acts he wanted to carry out. Was there regret in his conscience? Did he feel remorse? No, because there was

absolutely no reaction on his face. He stood there like he was nailed down to the bench. He left the courtroom the way he had come in, with automatic movements, showing no feeling and no regret..." (A. M., f. 238 – "Solun Dnevnik".)

From all the material presented in the court only part of it, that which suited the authorities, was presented along with a summary of the court proceedings and the verdict. The entire public hearing was not a hearing, but simply a public reading of the evidence and a pronouncement of the verdict. It went right from the secret trial, or rather from the collection of the evidence material, to publicly pronouncing the verdict, without giving the defendants a chance to explain or defend themselves. The court authorities insisted that besides recognizing the defendants as perpetrators, that they also be recognized as witnesses. Because of the strict secrecy the Gemidzhii exercised, no witnesses could be found to verify that the crimes using dynamite were actually committed by the Gemidzhii themselves. Proof, for example, of the Gemidzhii participating in the digging of the tunnel was provided only by the Gemidzhii themselves. All Gemidzhii, except for Shatev, were used as witnesses to verify not only their own crimes but also those of the others.

As was explained during the trial, the Gemidzhii were charged with "attempting to change the form of rule in the Rumelian Vilayets", which was basically true, but the claim that the Gemidzhii belonged to the "subversive committee" headquartered in Sofia was false. The court, as did the Solun consuls, made many attempts to hide the real reasons why the Gemidzhii had done what they did, which was to prompt the Europeans to intervene on behalf of the Macedonian people and allow them to have their autonomy. The judicial authorities, of course, were not going to bring that up as the reason that led the Macedonian revolutionaries to commit such dangerous acts and with such surprising boldness, willing to give their young life in the Solun streets. The Ottoman authorities presented the Gemidzhii as a bunch of "criminals" who wanted to kill, burn and destroy European property, and to kill European diplomats for no reason at all. And "why?" Naturally no one had an answer. The only answer given was that the Gemidzhii wanted to change the government in Macedonia.



The court did not succeed in finding any connection between the Gemidzhii and the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, nor did it have any success in finding a connection between the Gemidzhii and the Bulgarians. Regarding this matter, Steg wrote the following to Delcase:

“The trial will bring bitter disappointment to those who expected that, after more than a month of investigations, interesting details would be revealed about a supposed relationship between the Gemidzhii and the revolutionary committee. It was said at the outset of the investigation that members of the subversive committee from Sofia were responsible for carrying out the assassinations in Solun but to this day no evidence has been presented, so the verdict is limited to pure speculation and to the statements provided by the defendants about their own personal participation in the April 28 and 29 events.

Perhaps things will become clearer later in the processes after the court releases its findings. However, this being a closed investigation creates some suspicions regarding the question of the role of the revolutionary committees in the recent events in Solun.” (Ibid, report of June 12, 1903.)

Of course the trials, held later, did not disclose any direct participation of the Organization (MRO) in the Solun assassinations.

The only thing that was disclosed in Solun was the death sentence which could only be commuted by the Sultan himself. Many Muslims believed that the lives of the four Gemidzhii might be spared if the Russian emperor made an appeal to pardon the Gemidzhii in exchange for sparing the murderer of the Russian consul Shcherbin. On the other hand, many felt that the death penalty was fair considering the amount of mayhem the Gemidzhii had caused in Solun. The military court, as was mentioned earlier, was created in order to efficiently, effectively and promptly deliver justice.

Since most of the Gemidzhii were from Veles, the investigators naturally assumed that the dynamite must have come from Veles. As

a result, the military court expanded its activities in this city. A special investigative commission, headed by Dzhemal-Bey, was sent to Veles to investigate. The commission arrested more than 20 people and charged them as accomplices in the Solun attacks. Included among the people arrested were Giosho Popiordanov, Ortse's father, Petar Popiordanov, Giosho's brother, Ivan, Ilia and Gigo Popiordanov, Petar's sons, Ilia Malinkin, Alekso Minov (Kaniko), Lazo and Nikola Organdzhiev, Giosho, brother of Todor Organdziev, his son-in-law Todor Vanov, Ivan Boshkov, Angele Kirkov, Dime Nichev and Gigo Sharlagandzhiata. They found several packages of dynamite at A. Minov's place and as a result had him severely tortured. To save himself, Minov jumped off the municipal building stairs but was not killed. He was badly wounded.

Most of the arrested in Veles, according some sources, were sentenced to 3 to 5 years in prison. Giosho, Petar and Ivan Popiordanov were sentenced to 3 years in prison. Ilia Popiordanov was sentenced to 10 years. The others were sent to serve their sentences in Edi-Kule but were released in about one year's time.

The next day after the Solun main Gemidzhii attacks took place, people in Veles heard that "something big" was happening in Solun. Those people who suspected that Ortse and his friend were up to something now knew what it was. Todor Organdziev found out about the Gemidzhii attacks when he was in Skopje buying tobacco seedlings. As the situation worsened and there was no movement of passenger trains, not knowing what was happening in Veles, Organdziev decided to flee and joined a cheta (an armed resistance group). He stayed with the cheta until the winter of 1903, after which he fled to Bulgaria. (P. Shatev, 402-403, H. Silianov, 264-265, T. Organdzhiev, 123.)

Only Organdziev knew how the dynamite had been delivered to Veles and from there to Solun. And because no one else knew, the authorities could learn nothing more than what they already knew. Shatev never mentioned that the dynamite was transported to Kochani.

The only thing that Giosho Popiordanov was guilty of was that he was Ortse's father. All the Popiordanovs were convicted because

they were Ortse's relatives. Almost all the people from Veles, who were convicted, were convicted only because they were suspected of having connections with the Gemidzhii. The authorities had no actual evidence of any connection.

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Out of about 350 defendants who were held in jail, 4 (the Gemidzhii) were sentenced to death by the military court, 29 were sent to prison with 5 to 101 year sentences and 25 were released. The deeds of the 29 were referred to the regular court and 266 others could not be tried because there was no evidence against them. (Silianov, 264.)

Also among those sent to the regular court was Ivan Garvanov, president of the MRO Central Committee. Some authors who wrote about the Solun assassinations believed that the Gemidzhii were somehow responsible for Ivan Garvanov's arrest as well as D. Mirchev's and others. Silianov wrote that the "babbling" of the Gemidzhii caused members of the MRO Central Committee to be sent to prison. They allegedly admitted that they had received money from Garvanov, which was enough cause for his arrest. It was also alleged that Milan Arsov had "betrayed" the MRO leaders and other members in Veles. (Ibid.)

"I am a victim, I have been betrayed..." said Garvanov at one point.

When he was asked "by whom?" he mentioned Milan Arsov by name. (P. Shatev, 445.)

"P. P-v (Pavel Shatev), the captured culprit who blew up the "Guadalquivir steamer," wrote H. Kotsev, "loosened his tongue and told the authorities everything. As a result of that Garvanov, D. Mirchev and 5 or 6 others became suspects." (H. Kotsev, 55.)

It is very important, from a practical and moral point of view, for any revolutionary to withhold information when questioned by an enemy entity. Weakness can be exploited by the police or by civilian entities and can have severe consequences for the movement. (The boundary of human endurance should not be forgotten. Our recent

history, from the First and Second Ilinden, is full of examples of heroes who, not wanting to fall into the hands of the enemy and endure torture and humiliation, committed suicide). Those who fall prey to torment and do break down are inflicted with great injustice before history, before the future generations. Those fainthearted revolutionaries who, without strong arguments, without taking into account all circumstances are the ones who are called “traitors”.

As for the Gemidzhii, there is no need for a wider explanation to show how the moral character of the survivors faded with the loss of Ortse, Kosta, Meche, Pingov, Trchkov and Tsvetko. But that does not mean that they deserve to be dishonoured so easily without deserving it. We think they do not deserve to be dishonoured.

Hristo Kotsev’s claim that Pavel Shatev betrayed Garvanov is not only not based on facts, but it is malicious. Silianov and Garvanov’s accusations are just that, accusations without proof. This raises the question: “Why did the Gemidzhii ‘betray’ only Garvanov and his comrades and not those of the more than 2,000 unknown Macedonian martyrs who filled the Ottoman prisons?”

It is true that the Gemidzhii admitted their deeds. They could not hide them, especially Shatev. He did not want to hide his own deeds. As for the discovery of the Gemidzhii circle, it was revealed by someone of the first three when they were arrested. The authorities discovered the names of the perpetrators from the surviving Gemidzhii themselves, how many they were and what each was supposed to do. But we certainly do not believe that it was Shatev who released information on members of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, and especially on Garvanov. We can say that with certainty.

First, Shatev remained calm and maintained to the end that he was Georgi Manasov from Kiustendil and that he had not studied in Solun. Shatev told the court, in front of Garvanov, that he did not know him as well as the other professors. So, how could he have “betrayed” people he did not know? Second, here is what Shatev said in his first memoirs, according to L. Miletich, about Bogdanov and Arsov’s arrest and behaviour: “Georgi Bogdanov was arrested in the morning of April 16, 1903, (it must have been April 17

because the main actions took place during the night of the 16/29). After he threw a bomb he hid himself in his house and stayed there. His house was next to the 'Alhambra' café where Milan Arsov threw a bomb. The police searching this area broke into Bogdanov's room, arrested him and found a certain amount of dynamite. He looked a bit 'disturbed' in the prison. When the authorities brought Bogdanov to the courtroom with me and confronted him, he seemed confused: When they asked him: 'Why did you throw a bomb at the Alhambra?' (They thought he threw a bomb there). He said: 'Milan threw a bomb into the Alhambra.' And when they asked him: 'Where did you throw a bomb?' He said: 'I threw one in Nonio.' At that point the police were tipped off that there was another perpetrator named 'Milan'. And after Bogdanov said that Milan was from Veles, all persons named Milan in Veles and Solun were collected and brought to the court. Then a policeman named Panaiot, from Veles, said that Milan Arsov was friends with Ortse and with me (Shatev), they let everyone go.

Milan Arsov was captured and arrested on May 9, 1903. Then, in order to determine if there was a connection between us (Gemidzhii) and the MRO Central Committee (the police knew that Garvanov was somehow mixed up with the Gemidzhii but had no proof), they asked Bogdanov: 'Do you know Garvanov?' Bogdanov said: 'I do not know a Garvanov, but I do know that we wanted to kill a man named Garvanov.' Bogdanov then told the court that we (Gemidzhii) received 36 liras from the same Garvanov. When the authorities later asked Arsov, if what Bogdanov said was true, that Garvanov gave us (Gemidzhii) 36 liras, Arsov replied: 'It is true.' But by then Garvanov had already been arrested." (P. Shatev, *The Solun assassin*, 49-51.)

The testimony of the two Gemidzhii claiming that Garvanov gave them money was proof that Garvanov was involved with the Gemidzhii. And since the authorities knew, without any doubt, that Garvanov and his comrades were members of the MRO, they, without hesitation, should have concluded that Garvanov was also a member of the Gemidzhii circle. Now, as an associate of the Gemidzhii, Garvanov should have faced similar charges as the Gemidzhii and should have been tried by the same military court and not by the civil court as was decided. Earlier we noted that the

military court tried the relatives of the Gemidzhii, who were innocent of any crimes, and found them guilty only because they were related to the Gemidzhii.

But even though Arsov confirmed what Bogdanov had said about receiving money from Garvanov, Shatev, in his extensive memoirs, which he had personally written, does not repeat the above allegations and denies that Arsov was some kind of traitor.

After the verdicts were pronounced, the Gemidzhii were transferred to a central prison together with all the other prisoners including Garvanov. There were many disputes between Garvanov and Shatev with the main dispute being the “betrayal”. While in prison among the many Macedonians imprisoned with him, Garvanov deliberately spread the news about the Gemidzhii “betrayal” in order to compromise them. “For several weeks I tried to persuade Garvanov that neither Milan Arsov nor Georgi Bogdanov had said anything to compromise him on purpose at the time of the investigation or in front of the military court, but Ivan Garvanov persisted with his claim that he was a victim and that he had suffered from their betrayal.” (P. Shatev, Macedonia under slavery, 448-449.)

The allegations that Garvanov was a victim of a Gemidzhii betrayal took a new dimension during Garvanov’s trial. People in the prison began to revolt. A lot of the prisoners began to believe Garvanov. Shatev took it upon himself to write a statement which was then signed by Arsov and, through the prison director, sent it to the court. With that statement Arsov informed the court that he wanted to clarify some things about Garvanov and his group on trial. Arsov was allowed to appear before the court as a witness and read the following pre-prepared text:

“My lords, everything I, the undersigned and convicted in connection with the events in the city of April 28, 29 and 30, 1903, have said about the accused persons now being tried is recorded in the protocols of the military court. I ask the court to take a minute and see what I have said in relation to the defendants. However, today, when in the whole of Macedonia, the people are dissatisfied and rebellious... when the Macedonian people are fighting for justice and freedom, these gentlemen here have no courage to stand up

before the court and say what the people, with weapons in their hands, are fighting for. I ask the court to find the defendants innocent or, if they are guilty then they should repent for what they thought and did...”

“Have you anything else to say?” asked the president of the court.

“No!” replied Arsov and left the text he had read on the desk. (Ibid, 456.)

The reader, of course, might wonder if it was even possible for the Gemidzhii to take this issue as far as they did. Of course it was possible. They were sentenced to death and had nothing to lose. On the other hand, they wanted to clear the air and their good names for future generations. This was the only way the Gemidzhii could have fought back against those who wanted to discredit them and compromise their work.

As we have already pointed out, relations between the Gemidzhii and the MRO Central Committee were never great. Disagreements between them continued even now when many of them were in prison. Shatev challenged Garvanov about the loss of the 1,000 kilograms of dynamite. Garvanov denied that he had anything to do with the disappearance of that dynamite. Garvanov blamed Shatev for rushing the “assassinations” and not waiting for the uprising to take place first, as was desired by the MRO. Other prisoners were also present at these discussions. Feeling he was losing the argument, Garvanov at one point turned to the audience and said: “Don’t listen to him, he is not a people’s person, he is an anarchist!”

The written statement made by Arsov to the court, mentioned earlier, created another argument between Garvanov and the Gemidzhii. A question was raised that if Garvanov and his bunch were asked by the court if they members of the MRO Central Committee, would they answer honestly or deny it? Garvanov’s answer was that if he was asked before the uprising took place he would deny everything, but if he were asked during the uprising then he would declare before the court that he was a member of the Organization and state its goals. But Shatev insisted that Garvanov,

in either case, should admit that he is a member of the Organization and its leadership.

The Gemidzhii believed that, after what happened in Solun, the Ottoman government would never release anyone who was suspected of engaging in revolutionary activities. They also believed that given the circumstances these court proceedings would be attended by the public and journalists, as well as some of the consuls from the European consulates in Solun who were interested in finding out more about what happened. According to the Gemidzhii, it was best if Garvanov gave up on the idea that somehow he was going to be set free, admit that he was a member of the MRO Central Committee and concentrate on addressing the court with the truth of what was happening in Macedonia and agitate the foreigners in favour of the Macedonian cause.

“Don’t find yourselves in the same situation that Dr. Hristo Tatarchev, Hristo Matov and other defendants found themselves in court in 1901 when they denied that they were members of the MRO and insisted they had never heard of such an Organization.”

To that Garvanov answered: “I will think about it...”

As a rule Macedonian revolutionaries would never admit anything to the Ottomans in their courts. It was necessary to maintain silence because those belonging to the Organization or participating in revolutionary activities were often tried and found guilty, purely on suspicion with no evidence to support the charges. As was also well-known, anyone being a member of a revolutionary organization not only knew of the organization’s activities but also knew other people who were members. Admitting that one was a member of the Organization would be disastrous for the cause. So, no matter how much these people were tortured they would admit to nothing, earning great praise from the Macedonian people.

Suspected revolutionaries were usually tried behind closed doors. So, popularizing the revolutionary movement behind closed doors in the Ottoman courts was never a good idea. But in Garvanov’s case, where the trial was open to the public, because the Ottoman authorities wanted to show the outside world that their judiciary was



fair and democratic, Garvanov, according to the Gemidzhii, had a shot at making a difference for the Macedonian people. This trial was special, useful and very important because foreign journalists and consular representatives were attending it. But Garvanov was not one of those people who wanted to sacrifice anything for Macedonia. He did not want to go in front of this unfriendly court and openly and publicly proclaim the goals of the movement and that he was a part of it, risking the possibility that he might be severely condemned. The Gemidzhii who had the means to follow his trial understood that he denied all charges for the sole purpose of being acquitted or for receiving a lower sentence. Upset by this, the Gemidzhii decided to give the court the written statement, mentioned earlier, which not only denied the assertion that Garvanov was betrayed by the Gemidzhii, but also humiliated and degraded him as a revolutionary.

In the end, this question must be asked which is difficult to answer: “If the Gemidzhii betrayed Garvanov for giving them financial help, then why was Garvanov not tried by the military court?”

When the Ilinden Uprising was started, a new conflict emerged in “Edi-Kule” prison in Solun.

In the fall of 1902, Dr. Tatarchev and Matov, former members of the MRO Central Committee, were released from the Ottoman prison and left for Bulgaria. They arrived in Bulgaria at the time when the Gorno-Dzumaia Uprising was in full swing and when the Supremacists (Bulgarians) appointed themselves representatives of the Macedonian people before Europe. The Macedonian revolutionaries, headed by Gotse Delchev and Giorce Petrov, welcomed Tatarchev and Matov with much joy and hope that they would contribute to strengthening of the anti-Supremacist front in Macedonia and Bulgaria. But they were bitterly disappointed. When Tatarchev and Matov arrived in Sofia, they appeared as representatives of the “Central Committee”. This is what Giorce Petrov wrote about that: “They immediately showed us that they wanted to play the old priority role they had in Solun. In their view Garvanov was not leadership material so they immediately showed desire to have closer contact with the Bulgarian society and government and to create new relations between the MRO and

Bulgaria. As a result they began to get closer to the ‘more moderate’ Supremacists...” “This tactic,” wrote Petrov, “I call underhanded considering how much blood was shed and how many people were consumed... Matov and Tatarchev came to us recommending prudence and declaring us insignificant factors in the struggle and themselves relevant factors. This stunt by Matov and Tatarchev was as selfish as they come...” (Memoirs - Giorche Petrov, Skopje 1950, 119.)

Being opportunists and ideologically close to the Supreme Committee, Tatarchev and Matov were more inclined towards finding understanding with others like themselves in the ranks of the Revolutionary Organization in official circles in Bulgaria and in the Supreme Committee than in standing shoulder to shoulder with the determined and practicing revolutionaries following the aspirations of the Macedonian people. Their opportunism became an expression in everything they did.

Until Tatarchev and Matov arrived in Bulgaria, MRO and its principles were represented and protected by Gotse Delchev and Giorche Petrov who, in fact, were the first foreign representatives of MRO in Bulgaria. These principles were well-defended until Garvanov became president of the Central Committee and Dimitar Stefanov and Tushe Deliovanov were appointed officials outside the Macedonian border. But the role of the outside the border officials was completely changed with Tatarchev and Matov’s arrival in Bulgaria.

On August 10, 1903, just after the start of the Ilinden Uprising, Tatarchev and Matov dispatched the famous “internal organization’s declaration” to the foreign diplomatic representatives in Sofia, explaining the reasons for the uprising and making demands on behalf of the insurgents. They were demanding the appointment of a Christian governor in Macedonia and the introduction of international control over the implementation of reforms in accordance with suggestions made by the Great Powers.

The usual conflict between the Gemidzhii and Garvanov did not escalate when Tatarchev and Matov appointed themselves representatives and spokesmen of the revolutionary organization,

but it did when they dispatched the above-mentioned declaration to the Great Powers. Shatev was furious and condemned the action taken by Tatarchev and Matov in Bulgaria to inform the Great Powers as destructive and counterproductive. He considered their action not only harmful to the ongoing Ilinden Uprising but also to the true character of the Macedonian struggle, making it look like it had been orchestrated by the Bulgarian government. In fact, he believed that what Tatarchev and Matov had done in Bulgaria compromised the strength of the Macedonian movement. And because Garvanov fully approved of their actions, Chatev asked him the following question:

“...Indeed, Mr. Garvanov, please tell me how will the European and Balkan authorities and stakeholders interpret the fact that Hristo Matov, at the outset of the Uprising, informed the diplomatic representatives, not in Turkey but in Bulgaria? Did the concerned Great Powers not have diplomatic representatives here in Turkey? Why did they have to be informed by IMRO officials outside of the border, in Sofia of all places, which - rightly or not – has been a suspect in encouraging the insurgency and other actions in Macedonia?” (P. Shatev, 451-452.)

Garvanov and his comrades were tried and convicted and two months later, in the fall of 1903, were sent to prison. The four Gemidzhii were locked up in the Edi-Kule prison waiting for their death sentences.

In the spring of 1904, the Sultan decreed a general amnesty for political prisoners and all those who were sentenced to long prison terms were released. Garvanov was released before serving a year. In total 600 people were released. All the people from Veles were also released except for Ilia Popiordanov, who was found to be an associate of the Gemidzhii and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. From what we know, Garvanov, Mirchev and I. Kondov, who were all released, had been exiled to Rhodes. According to Shatev, Garvanov has been sentenced for a few years and not for 101 years as he had claimed. And from this we can conclude that he was never charged as an associate of the Gemidzhii.

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Even though much of the top Organization's leadership knew about the work of the Gemidzhii, it appears most of its ranks were not aware of them and it certainly caused much surprise when they were found out. The Gemidzhii were inspiring and admired for their courage and self-sacrifice but not so much for the severe consequences that they caused for the Organization.

We don't know exactly how the top leaders of the Organization's governing structures responded to the Gemidzhii actions but we do know that Gotse Delchev did not have much time to react because he himself was killed only days after Ortse, Kosta and Meche died. Gotse too spilled his blood on Macedonian soil in Banitsa, joining the young men from Veles. Unfortunately, little to nothing was said about the Gemidzhii and about the Solun assassinations in the memoirs of the many prominent Macedonian revolutionary leaders.

However, there is no doubt as to what kind of impression the Gemidzhii left on those who were engaged in the final preparations for the Uprising, who saw Macedonia turn into a huge military camp, into a huge jail in which Macedonia's most intellectual forces were thrown, and the huge amount of terror and intimidation that was used to break the Organization...

At the time when news of the Solun assassinations was spreading throughout Macedonia, the top-ranking Bitola Revolutionary District leaders were assembled in the village Smilevo for a Congress. Here is how the news was received according to Vasil Chakalarov, a delegate from the Kostur District, who left us valuable information about the Congress. Chakalarov described the reception of the news and Damian Gruev's reaction as follows:

“A letter arrived from Bitola. It was sent by Luka Dzhepov. It wrote: ‘The Ottoman bank in Solun has been blown up with dynamite. Bombs are being thrown all throughout the city... A French ship has been sunk... All this was done by our people. The culprit who blew up the ship has been caught...’ That surprised us. Damian Gruev became upset and, more or less, said the following:

“To hell with them! When I was in Solun those pests were boasting of doing something but did not wait until the day of the uprising like we asked them. They are worthless people, not worth more than 250 liras. They are about 15 to 16 misunderstood souls. They constantly intimidate our brothers in Solun, threatening that if we did not give them money or if any of them were caught, they would ignite their dynamite. As soon as one of us is lost, they say, we will spare no one... They constantly intimidated us in this way. I made suggestions to destroy them, but here too I encountered difficulties. We could not capture them all at once, it was impossible. Capturing them individually was very risky because they were prepared to put their plans into action, and that is what they did... To hell with them!”

Chakalarov continues: “Sarafov took me to the side and told me that he sent them (Gemidzhii) to Solun and that they were completing their mission as ordered. Sarafov said he gave them more than 300 liras to do this. Sarafov said he did not know why they enacted their plans earlier than expected, but it seemed to him that they (Gemidzhii) may have encountered some sort of danger that forced them to act immediately. Whatever it may have been, Sarafov seemed happy with the actions they took. Sarafov also said: ‘Let Gruev and his supporters say whatever they want. The way Gruev thinks, the Uprising may not start until next year. Let it be however it wants to be...’

And so, Sarafov was delighted with the news from Solun.” (Original Protocols from the Smilevo Congress - II. Ilinden, IX, 7 (87), Sofia August 1937, 8.)

Sarafov, in his own memoirs, said he was surprised by the Gemidzhii enacting their plans early. He admits that he did not expect them to act so soon. “I knew,” he wrote, “that they were in discussions and had an understanding with Garvanov and Delchev about when to schedule their actions...” Later we found out that the reason for expediting their plans was to avoid their tunnel being discovered by the Ottomans who wanted to dig on the street above it. There was also some mistrust... The leaders of the Gemidzhii circle did not trust Garvanov and his comrades with such

information about their work. (Damian Gruev's memoirs, Boris Sarafov..., 89-90.)

Even though the Gemidzhii had warned the MRO Central Committee in Solun about their actions, the Committee took no measures to protect itself and its people in order to avoid arrests in the event of the assassinations being enacted.

And, sure enough, the entire MRO Central Committee was arrested after the Solun assassinations and the Organization was left without a Central Committee. Being left without a Central Committee, its functions, in some ways, were taken over by Tatarchev and Matov who were not in Macedonia and could not play the role of central leaders during the uprising. Management of the insurrection was actually left to the district leaders. About this Sarafov wrote: "After the assassinations... Solun was already lost as a centre and therefore every district was left to take care of itself. Even our Smilevo Congress resolutions were completely independent of the Central Committee. It never occurred to anyone to propose sending our decision to withdraw from the Central Committee. Accordingly, Gruev had no respect for any Central Committee, especially for Garvanov." (Ibid.)

We should point out here that, in addition to the Central Committee, there were a few other senior leaders arrested after the Solun assassinations, but not many. This is because at that time almost all the regional leaders, who were more or less compromised, were in the mountains and out of reach of the authorities. The mass arrests, therefore, had little impact on the regional governing structure of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization.

## **IORDAN POPIORDANOV'S TWO LETTERS**

We saw how Sarafov helped the Gemidzhii materially but little has been said about how Gotse Delchev helped them, whose help was considerably larger and more diverse. But in spite of that, the Gemidzhii proved to be more loyal to Boris Sarafov than to Gotse Delchev. Why that is we don't know for sure. One of the reasons, obviously, was because Delchev always had conditions attached to his help (prepare but do nothing on your own), while Sarafov, who

took no account of consequences, did not do that. There was also the belief that the money they received from Delchev was money that the people had donated for the cause. The money received from Sarafov, however, they believed was Sarafov's "personal" money. That is why Ortse wanted to return it all to him. They were even grateful to Sarafov for the 1,000 kg of dynamite he sent them even though they never got it.

Here is what Shatev had to say about some of Ortse's gestures:

"Not only Ortse Popiordanov, but most of the Gemidzhii felt morally obligated to Boris Sarafov because of the material assistance he provided to us since the very beginning and because of the great confidence he had in some of us, especially in Ortse Popiordanov, whom he liked very much. We all respected Boris Sarafov mostly for the gesture he made in front of the Supreme Committee Congress when they asked him to provide a financial report. He did not want to tell them he gave the Gemidzhii money in case such a report ended up in Ottoman hands. He put his own reputation on the line rather than divulge the truth of where the money went. About the missing money he said: 'That sum of money I used to pay a loose woman with whom I had an intimate relationship'..."

"In our view," wrote Shatev, "Boris Sarafov ran over all the other leaders who could not do what he did and he branded himself... For those reasons he was our best friend and leader to whom we were grateful and admired... He was the only one who helped us unconditionally and that is why Ortse decided to pay back the money he had spent assisting us and to repay him for the money he had spent for the 1,000 kg of dynamite." (P. Shatev, 339-340.)

There is no doubt that Sarafov was capable of making such a "heavy" statement. Perhaps he did make such a statement. It was certain that he was accused of embezzling committee money.

In the beginning of 1901 it became quite clear that Sarafov would not be able to remain president of the Supreme Committee. After realizing that Sarafov's main task was to take over the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization's leadership, in order to direct its

activities according to the wishes of Prince Ferdinand, Gotse Delchev and Giorce Petrov pulled away the support they had given him in the beginning.

Sarafov's refusal to resign and voluntarily hand the Supreme Committee leadership over to General Tsonchev split the committee of officers into two groups, one headed by Sarafov and the other by Konchev. To solve the problem of who was going to be in the Supreme Committee led by Tsonchev, the 8<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary "Macedonian" Congress was convened and held in April 1901. Gotse Delchev, who also attended the Congress, made every effort to prevent Tsonchev from being elected head of the Supreme Committee. In a speech to the Congress, among other things, Delchev said that now no relationship exists between the MRO and the Supreme Committee. This is "because Sarafov wanted to send his people from here and appoint them heads of the Internal Organization (MRO). But that organization is local, secret... We are opposed to Boris Sarafov, because if he were to send his people there and appoint them leaders... it would have been a catastrophe..." (Krste Bitoski, Macedonia and the Principality of Bulgaria, 158.)

Because the Supreme Committee elected during this Congress was staffed by both Sarafov and Tsonchev's supporters, Tsonchev was unable to lead it by himself. As a result, another Congress was convened in July 1901. This was the 9<sup>th</sup> Regular Congress of the Macedonian immigrant's organization in Bulgaria.

It was during these two Congresses that Sarafov was accused by the central camp of embezzling committee money. This was done in order to compromise Sarafov and eliminate him as a factor in the immigrant movement. Because the missing funds could have been easily justified if Sarafov were to say that he gave most of them to assist the revolutionary movement in Macedonia, Delchev said: "The only funds that count as donations for the needs of the MRO are those that can be confirmed by the MRO Central Committee treasurer through receipts. If there are no proper receipts, it means that the money was not given to the Internal Organization (MRO). And in that case it should be known that these funds were not received in Macedonia..."



During the April Congress, Sarakinov, a well-known supremacist, accused Sarafov and other members of the former Committee of pilfering 100,000 francs and splitting them among themselves. However, neither Sarakin nor Tsonchev could prove their accusations. A special committee for auditing their finances was selected, but it did not do its job.

The indictment against Sarafov was renewed at the July Congress. Sarafov said that his reason for not wanting to disclose these sums was because he had personally raised them without invoking the name of the immigrant's organization. In July 1902 during the Tenth Congress, Sarafov was told that his finances had been audited by Tsonchev's Committee and found that he was short 6,000 leva. A committee was again formed but the embezzlement still remained undocumented. Sarafov said that all this was done to slander him and nothing more. (Memoirs - Damian Gruev, Boris Sarafov..., 62-73.)

Even if there was embezzlement, it was committed before April 1901, while Sarafov was still president of the Supreme Committee. But the help the Gemidzhii received from Sarafov was exactly one year later, in April 1902, when he did not have any function in the Supreme Committee and when no one could accuse him of embezzling this money. The things that Shatev wrote so well about "the degradation of Sarafov's dignity with the loose woman", we could not confirm.

Sarafov was an outgoing person who often came into contact with various people abroad. He had a great "weakness" for soliciting help for his "cause". His contemporaries knew him as a person who spent a lot of money easily (for his personal satisfaction, and to help others), but who also knew how to come by money in various ways. In March 1902, while visiting in Geneva, he received 50,000 francs from a wealthy Englishman. In Europe Sarafov made sure that he was well-known as the "leader" of the Macedonian revolutionary movement. And because of that he received a lot of money, but we don't know exactly what he promised to give his patrons in return. All we know is that the Englishman's daughter "strongly sympathized with his work". (Ibid, 71.)

Knowing that the Gemidzhii were in great need of financial assistance, the moment Sarafov received this money he contacted Ortse and asked him to come to Geneva and meet with him. Sarafov knew that the Gemidzhii had asked Delchev for help and thought that they probably did not receive it because of the conditions attached to it. When Ortse arrived in Geneva Sarafov gave him 10,000 francs. At the same time Sarafov promised him that he would also supply the Gemidzhii the 1,000 kg of dynamite for which they were desperate. It was said that Ortse was very happy when he returned from Geneva.

But there is a slightly different angle to this story. Simeon Radev, who then studied in Geneva and was a close associate of Sarafov's, said later that Ortse, for the three days he was in Geneva, had stayed at his place. He also said that Ortse had several secret meetings with Sarafov and that he was unhappy when he left Geneva. (H. Silianov, 258, note 1.)

Did Ortse promise Sarafov that he would return his money? According to Shatev's early memoirs (P. Shatev, *Solun Assassination*, 53.) the Gemidzhii were afraid that if they failed in their mission that money would have to revert back to the Organization and that it was why it was decided to return it directly to Sarafov.

A few months before the Gemidzhii enacted their plans in Solun, Ortse purchased 10,000 francs worth of life insurance with the "New York" company. He made the policy payable to Simeon Radev. Neither Radev nor Sarafov knew about the insurance. Then, just before the Gemidzhii began their actions, Ortse wrote a letter and sent it Simeon Radev, informing him of the insurance policy and begging him to cash it after he was gone and give the money to Sarafov. Then, in the fall of 1903, the "New York" company informed Radev that "he was the recipient of 10,000 francs". It was a great surprise to him. A little later, a friend of Ortse's came over and read him Ortse's last will and testament. That money was then given to Boris Sarafov. Ortse's friend explained to Radev that the 10,000 francs he received from Ortse's life insurance policy was to pay back the 10,000 francs owed to Sarafov. (Silianov, 258, note 1.) Radev then gave Sarafov power of attorney and Sarafov himself

claimed the money from the “New York” company. Part of the money, probably one half of it, Sarafov gave to Ortse’s father who he had summoned to go to Sofia for that purpose.

Radev does not mention the letter by which Shatev claims Radev was informed.

Very few documents from the Gemidzhii exist or have been found and for that reason the two letters Ortse wrote, which we have, are very precious. We have decided to publish them here in full. (Cultural life, XXIII, 6, Skopje 1978, 20.) The first letter is from Ortse to Simeon Radev:

“My dear brother Simeon,

The time is nearing when we put our plans into action and realize the work we began. Because I have decided that I will no longer be here after my work is done, as is the charter of my consciousness, I have decided to write these few lines to you so as to inform you of my intentions and to make my peace with you. A few months ago, I went to the ‘New York’ insurance company and I purchased a life insurance policy for 10,000 golden francs, the sum of which will be paid to you after my death. I want my effort for the liberation of our beloved Macedonia, for which I live, work and die, to be of benefit even after my death.

I beg of you, after you cash the policy please give the entire sum of money to our great comrade and friend Boris Razlogov (he means Sarafov). The other Gemidzhii and I value him highly. We love and respect him. He understood and helped us with both advice and money. Without his help we would not have been able to put together a dowry for the bride and celebrate her wedding. (By ‘bride’ and ‘wedding’ he means the Gemidzhii and their actions.) Give him our regards and express our gratitude.

We will not see each other again. Please wait for the celebration of our general deeds and experience the liberation of Macedonia.

I kiss you brotherly  
Ortse.”

The next letter was sent to his girlfriend. And from it, the reader can see Ortse's devotion to the work of the Gemidzhii and his love for his people and his homeland.

“My beloved and only Kate,

When you read my letter, I will no longer be here - I will be a corpse, or already thrown into a hole like a dead dog. But in the situation I am in before my death, in which I have another hour or two to live, for as long as I throw the last bomb and pull the trigger of my nagant (pistol?), I think of you. This letter will prove to you how much I love you.

I loved you from the first time I saw you. You were my only joy, but I felt I had no right to tie myself to you. I don't belong to myself... I belong to my work, which has been the purpose and meaning of my life - to work and die for the freedom of my people and for my esteemed and beloved Macedonia. I loved you with all the pores of my body. I felt the need to see you, to listen to your voice, which sounds like a sitar (Indian stringed instrument). And yet I avoided you because I was afraid that my frequent encounters with you would weaken my will and soften my resolve, because you were my only relation with life and nothing should have bound me to it. Sometimes I was rude, even angry with you - forgive me for my rudeness and cruelty, behind them I hid my boundless love and my heart bleeds. I believe you will forgive me, you are a good person. Now I feel sorry, I was not myself a better person... more attentive and gentler towards you.

You will surely ask: Is it necessary for me to die? Is there no other way for me? But I have to tell you that I must be true to my commitment to my friends: The one who gambles with the lives of others has no right to spare his own. I knew that what we do will bring tears, suffering and death to many innocent people, and do you think I still deserve to live after that? I don't think that would be right. To die for me is a supreme honour of my conscience. And then my motto would not be just words, but deeds which in the end would adorn my work. There is also one last thing - I don't want to give my enemies the pleasure of mocking me and making fun of me.

Why do I need a life deprived of freedom to rot in some dark cell in Edi-Kule prison, or to melt under the scorching sun in the Sahara? No, I prefer to die! - With my death I toss my infinite contempt at my foes and occupiers of my homeland. I want to die the way I live - modestly and honestly, while faithful to myself - I wanted to be and remain a complete person.

I must finish. Time does not wait. There are a lot of things flooding back into my soul, but you will not get a chance to hear about them. It is best this way; your heart has foretold what I would like to write to you in this last hour.

Time will pass, your wounds will heal. Life is stronger than everything. I ask you, no I beg you, please find yourself another man, worthy of your love, and give him your heart and your love, give him the joys you kept for me. I wish you to be happy. Sometimes, in the evening shadows, when memories come out and penetrate into your soul, remember me. I thank you for this.

Hugs and kisses from your first and last of the self-denying Gemidzhii.

Your Ortse”

## **FATE OF THE GEMIDZHII SENTENCED TO DEATH**

The death sentences imposed on the Gemidzhii had to be confirmed by the Sultan. And, since they were not immediately confirmed, it became clear that the Sultan had not made up his mind. In the meantime the Gemidzhii were transferred to the central Edi-kule prison where there was a large number of Macedonian prisoners arrested because of the Solun assassinations. Many of those arrested on suspicion were released by the end of June 1903. Many others were not released until April 1904 when a general amnesty was granted by the Sultan. About 1,300 people were arrested after the Solun assassinations and during the Ilinden Uprising.

The amnesty included all political prisoners, except those who were involved in the destruction of public and private properties. The four Gemidzhii were among those who were not pardoned. There was

also a group of Macedonian villagers who were also not pardoned because of their involvement in the diversion carried out at Angista under Gotse Delchev's instructions.

There was no hope for the Gemidzhii and they had nothing to hope for. The first option was execution, and the second life-long imprisonment. The first option meant a quick end for them. The second option meant a cruel and lingering end. But, the second option seemed more humane: to hope while they were alive.

Months and years passed while they waited for their death. While hundreds of Macedonian martyrs, who paid the usual "tax" for their involvement in the Macedonian liberation struggle, entered and exited the gates of Edi-Kule, the Gemidzhii still remained there. In April 1906, two groups of different kinds of prisoners arrived in Edi-Kule. These were political prisoners from the Bitola and Skopje prisons. Among others, in the first group, were Priest Georgi Vasilev from Lerin, Simeon Shishkov from Ekshisu, the famous leader Aleko Dzhorlev from the village Banitsa, Lerin Region, and Blagoi Simeonov from Demir Hisar, Bitola Region. In the second group were Petar Kushev from Veles, renowned revolutionary Todor Lazarov from Stip and others. All of these people were sentenced to over 10 years of hard labour but were kept in captivity.

May 6, 1906 was a beautiful spring day. There was a lot of activity among the guards opening and closing doors. There was the constant snapping and clatter of iron. The prisoners were being moved around. Then the day came when the Gemidzhii too were "moved" from Edi-kule. They were led together with the other prisoners. Some were destined for Asia Minor and some for Fezan, Africa. They were chained together, one hundred and fifty of them, and paraded through the streets of Solun, through a narrow cordon of curious onlookers, as they approached the harbour towards the ship "Konstantinople". A person, accompanied by two policemen, arrived at the ship and gave the prisoners a modest amount of money. It was assistance money from the Protestant Church community in Solun.

On May 10, 1906 the prisoners arrived in Smyrna. Here the authorities separated the large group into three smaller groups. The

group convicted with 10 year prison sentences was sent to Podrum. The group convicted with 15 year sentences was sent to Rhodes. The third group, after spending 3 weeks in a Smyrna prison, on May 28, 1906 was loaded on a ship destined for Tripoli. The journey was very difficult. The prisoners were chained by their legs and neck at all times and were almost immobile. As a result Rizo Tpaikov, a 35 year-old man from a village in Gevgelia, died. He was ill and could not withstand the difficult journey. After being blessed by a priest, his body was then buried in the sea.

The prisoners sent to Tripoli stayed in a Tripoli prison for a month. Then on July 6, 1906, accompanied by a group of horsemen and 11 guards, the group was taken to its last destination - Fezan. There were a total of 55 prisoners of whom 51 were Macedonians. After much suffering, thirst, hunger, deprivation and being fried by the unbearable burning sun, on August 6, 1906 they arrived in Murzuk, the largest settlement in Fezan. Nikola Traikov never made it to Murzuk. He died a terrible death from sunstroke. Nikola Tpaikov was a 45 year-old illiterate but healthy man from Bitola with a strong will for life and freedom. His body, like that of Rizo, was blessed by Priest G. Vasilev and then buried somewhere in the Libyan Desert.

The prisoners were sure surprised at Murzuk by the reception they received from the authorities. Lieutenant-Colonel Mevlid, head of the gendarmerie and Secretary A. Hilmi, head administrator of the administrative order, did everything in their power to make life, more or less, easier for the prisoners. Mevlid informed them about the conditions in which they would be forced to live, advising them to be diligent and careful, because there were no means of receiving any help from the outside. Such attention left a great impression on them. But this kind of relationship was not approved by the higher authorities, which prompted them to replace Mevlid. But A. Hilmi, on the other hand, was an educated Turk, a writer and publicist, and continued to support the prisoners. Thanks to his authority the prisoners were freed from their chains. "The conditions under which the prisoners lived in the prison," wrote Hilmi, "were very difficult. The prisoners could hardly bear the very hot weather."

In November 1906, the head of the prison left and was temporarily replaced by Judge Murat, an Albanian from Podgoritsa. He was a terrible fanatic and very hostile towards the Macedonian prisoners. He thought that they were guilty of causing the crisis in Turkey and seemed to fulfill his patriotic duty by torturing them. In order to provoke the local population to rise against the Christian prisoners, Murat spread rumours that they were not only fugitives of the sultan and the state, but also great foes of the Muslim faith. The prisoners were forbidden from leaving their prison cells. Not even to wash their clothes. They were denied all care packages received from home that were sent to them through the post office. They were given salty bread to eat and not allowed to drink water. Those who needed it were not given medical assistance. But thanks to Hilmi, some of these bad deeds were curtailed.

The prison situation somewhat improved with the appointment of Dzhelal-Bey, as head of the prison in March 1907. Dzhelal-Bey promised the prisoners that he would do his best to give them everything required by law and tried to keep his promise.

Many Macedonian prisoners suffered greatly in the Ottoman prison in Murzuk, starting with the long and arduous journey to get there from Macedonia, the terrible climatic conditions, the difficult life in prison, the lack of medical assistance and so on. How many of the 50 prisoners left their bones there, we don't know. Two of the Gemidzhii also did not survive.

After suffering for eight days from a terrible fever, on February 14, 1908, Marko Boshnakov the "grocer" died. Then in May of the same year, suffering from a serious illness, Milan Arsov, the youngest of the Gemidzhii, also fell ill. His illness caused particular grief among all the prisoners. Realizing that his end was nearing and that he would never again see his beloved Veles, Solun and Vardar, the young Arsov gathered enough strength to say goodbye to all his friends in the prison. "He," wrote Shatev," surprised everyone before he died. We all shed tears for him... The last moment, before he closed his eyes, he saw our tears flow. It was a memorable and sad moment. During the afternoon of June 21, 1908, when the sun was preparing to hide behind the highest mountain peaks, we all



kissed out deceased comrade before putting him in the sandy black tomb and covering him with sand...”

And then, when the prisoners began to believe that this was how it was going to be for the rest of their lives and that there would be no salvation for them other than death, something unbelievable happened. News came out through the Libyan Desert that they would be freed. It was a hot day in July when a telegram arrived in Murzuk, which said: “On the occasion of the dissolution of Parliament, the Sultan has decreed a general amnesty.” The majority of the prisoners were delighted with the prospect of being freed but, at the same time, they could not help themselves in believing that this was some sort of trick. The news was sudden and unexpected and therefore it had to be a lie. But it was not a lie. The July 1908 Young Turk Uprising opened a new page in the history of the Ottoman Empire and it also opened the doors of the Sultan’s dungeons to all political prisoners.

On July 30, 1908, an official telegram arrived in Murzuk with orders to free the prisoners. The Muslim prisoners were released the same day. However, the prison took its time with the release of the Macedonian prisoners. On August 13, 1908 the prison director summoned several prisoners and told them:

“I have just received a telegram from the Rumelian Vilayet head inspector who informed me that you too are covered by the general amnesty. Therefore from this moment forward you are all free. I salute you with joy and congratulate you on your liberation.”

After that all the Macedonian prisoners were immediately released. Obviously they all celebrated the good news but then problems began to surface. The Macedonians were having difficulty finding transportation from Murzuk to Tripoli. But since they were now free men, the authorities were no longer interested in them. The worst problem they faced was finding water, camels and guides. In the end, after lengthy insistence and pleas to the authorities, all the obstacles were overcome and the former prisoners were ready to return to their native lands.

The historian is not the one who can describe the psychological situation experienced by the Macedonian prisoners from the first day they received the news about the amnesty to the day they were freed and allowed to go home. That responsibility falls on the writer of the story.

The common ideals they fought for, as well as the same fate they shared in the Ottoman dungeons, greatly contributed to the solidarity between the Macedonian prisoners. This was for understandable reasons and it was particularly strong among the Gemidzhii. This was one of the reasons why Shatev and Bogdanov had difficulty accepting the idea that they were actually going home while their two close comrades, albeit dead, had to remain in this distant and quiet country. But what could they do? Only a few months had passed since they died and their bodies were just beginning to decay under the sand. Digging them out was forbidden and the penalties were high. However, there was no such thing as “difficulties” in the eyes of the Gemidzhii. Their debt to their friendship proved to be stronger than any obstacle.

After they were ready to go, the two Gemidzhii, with help from four other Macedonian prisoners, secretly unearthed Arsov and Boshnakov’s graves, cut off their heads and took them to their temporary residence. There they soaked the skulls in an iodine solution, placed them in two metal boxes and sealed them tightly.

On August 18, 1908 the population of Murzuk witnessed an unusual event. The Macedonian prisoners loaded a number of camels with supplies and set off for their homeland. On September 4, 1908 the caravan arrived in the Seba oasis, and on September 12, 1908 it arrived in Sokna. And so, from settlement to settlement, traveling through areas where there was no water for about 200 kilometres, the former Macedonian prisoners, on September 29, 1908, arrived in Tripoli. There they were well received by the local authorities. Mayor Asuna personally came out to see how they were doing. On October 4, 1908 they boarded the ship “Sumatra” with tickets paid for by the city authorities, and on October 5, 1908 they arrived in Malta. Then, traveling through Crete, Piraeus, Smyrna, Dede-Agach, Kavala, Lesbos, on October 16, 1908 they arrived in Solun. They returned to the same city where, more than two years before, they

were bound with chains around their necks and, like wild beasts, sent to the outer reaches of the still expanding Ottoman Empire, from where they could never return.

“After 2 to 4 days,” wrote Shatev, “we parted company and went home to our own houses, in the different parts of the three districts - Solun, Bitola and Skopje. When we parted company we were all alone, living with our memories of our captivity in Fezan...” (Pavel Shatev, *Incarnation in Sahara - Fezan*, Sofia 1910, Solun assassination and prisoners in Fezan according to Pavel Shatev’s memoirs.)

Boshnakov and Arsov’s skulls were handed over to their parents to give them a proper burial in their native cemeteries.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the Solun assassinations, from their echoes in Europe and their consequences in Macedonia, were the most extreme event in the period before the Ilinden Uprising. Almost all authors who have dealt with and deal with the history of the Macedonian national revolutionary movement have approached the Solun assassinations as a separate subject. The many authors who have tried to evaluate the Gemidzhii actions, in some way, were no doubt impressed by the heroism of these young men but have not been in a position to be objective.

The Gemidzhii believed that with their individual armed actions they could possibly influence, even force Europe to intervene in Macedonia, and once it did it would naturally favour the liberation movement. Unfortunately, as we have found out, those beliefs were cunningly unrealistic. It was understandable but very naïve for the Gemidzhii to have had such beliefs. More specifically, they falsely believed that by destroying the material wealth of a country, they would be able to challenge its government and that the same country would intervene in their favour. “There is, indeed, a great dose of naivety and incomprehensible contradiction in the faith that guides the Gemidzhii bombs against the Europeans. They are expecting freedom from European intervention, they very well know that the revolutionary movement in Macedonia has no power to deal with

the Ottoman Empire alone, but believed European intervention would be more easily and promptly provoked by terror against the same Europeans, through a struggle that by nature would stir up disgust in the Europeans. This provocation, the Gemidzhii believed, could be prompted through ‘anarchist’ attacks...” (H. Silianov, 260.)

Developing their revolutionary circle under the influence of anarchist ideas and adopting a terrorist doctrine as their guide for action, the Gemidzhii could not resonate any differently. They thought that what the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization could achieve with tens of thousands of casualties, they could achieve on their own by sacrificing their own lives. They did not think much about the consequences of their actions and what they could bring about against others, but they knew that those consequences would be severe. Their belief was strictly, “We will answer for our own actions!” which turned out to be incorrect.

The Gemidzhii did not take advice or listen to what Delchev, Gruev and the other Macedonian revolutionary leaders told them, especially when they were asked to postpone their actions and trigger them as part of and within the Uprising. The revolutionary leaders had their own justification for that. But the Gemidzhii thought that such a delay had certain risks associated with it which could ruin their plans. They blew up the Ottoman bank in Solun early in order to reduce those risks. One risk was that their tunnel might be discovered if they waited too long. Another risk was that their dynamite might not function if it was exposed to moisture underground for too long. On top of that the Europeans, as we saw, began to write about Macedonians preparing for an uprising, making the Ottoman authorities nervous, which could have led to the discovery of their plans. The authorities began to escalate their vigilance, but thanks, among other things, to their secrecy and to the Macedonian revolutionary attitude towards the Gemidzhii, their plans were kept a secret to the end. One thing that is strange about all this is that the Ottoman authorities did not suspect a tunnel being dug under the Solun bank even after they discovered the tunnel under the Ottoman bank in Tsari Grad (Constantinople) not so long ago.

The Ottoman city crews digging up the street above their tunnel in Solun was another reason which made the Gemidzhii nervous and which led them to decide to blow up the bank early.

The bottom line is that the Gemidzhii not only had different ideas about how to conduct the struggle for freedom but refused to allow themselves to be restricted by outside forces. Their main goal was to prepare and execute their own plans when it suited them best. They did not know or bother to find out when the Uprising was going to take place mainly because they did not believe that the Organization was capable or ready for such a feat. We should clarify something at this point. When Gotse Delchev asked the Gemidzhii to delay their actions he did not think of an Uprising, but of other things. He himself, at that time, did not know that an early Uprising was being planned. All Delchev was concerned about was that their actions be coordinated with those of the MRO leadership. The Gemidzhii too did not have a definite schedule of when to start their actions. Their success, almost exclusively depended on their ability to find money and dynamite. If they had done that, they would have enacted their plans a lot sooner. In any case, the pressure put on the Gemidzhii by the Organization to delay their actions literally had no effect.

However, as it turned out, the Gemidzhii were ready to act only a few months before the Uprising began. Wider interests now dictated that they delay their plans, regardless of the prospects and the possibility that their plans would fail completely. But for Ortse, Kirkov, Mechetov... that would be “not death” (as they had promised each other for the liberation of Macedonia), but betrayal of the ideals that they swore to serve under. They, who like moles dug the soil out of the tunnel with their own fingernails, whose will for the liberation of Macedonia was boundless, who were determined to sacrifice themselves for the cause, when after all this effort they were ready to jump into action, there was no force on earth that could stop them from “committing the assassinations”. They blindly believed in their work and in the results of their self-sacrifice. They imagined that Europe “would” intervene and before their eyes imagined seeing European warships arriving in the port of Solun. They “imagined” an autonomous Macedonia in which the Sultan’s tyranny was abolished, and yesterday’s humiliated and oppressed people boldly marched forward into freedom and progress!

Was this a delusion, a naïve belief in the impossible? Shatev, who saw the results of his own work, avoided speaking about it. Here is what T. Organdziev wrote about it:

“The Gemidzhii expressed the idealism and the sense of vengeance that every Macedonian wanted to express. The people will always admire and appreciate their self-sacrifice. There is no question that, as far as I am concerned, we inadequately set our ideals in the service of our people... We were under deep misconceptions, believing that personal heroism drove events in life. We did not give it much thought that we were a part of the people and that our work would be more fruitful only if it was connected with the people and part of their work. We did not understand Delchev who defined the popular mass uprising as the sole solution in the struggle against slavery and, instead of linking our work and subordinating it to the expected uprising, we lived with the illusion of moving forward, by ourselves, with our own personal heroism instead of letting the popular uprising solve the task that only a popular uprising can solve. By doing this, we made everyone’s work harder, the kind of work for which we were determined to sacrifice our lives. The Sultan’s authority became even more vigorous and ruthless after our actions, which gave rise to even greater persecution. And, at the same time, the European capitalists rebuilt the bank and replaced their ship. And so, by blowing up one bank and sinking one ship, we practically did nothing to affect European interest or to change the status quo at home.

Perhaps there would have been another outcome had we connected our work with the Ilinden Uprising and in line with the people in overthrowing the Sultan from power.

There were some people, honest people, who believed that the heroism and self-sacrifice of the Gemidzhii, through individual terrorist acts, as a method of struggling, would bring success to the Macedonian liberation struggle. But after the Solun assassinations, those beliefs melted away. The illusions that the European imperialist forces, touched by our self-sacrifices, would intervene also melted away... The meddling of imperial forces in Macedonia did lead to the replacement of the Sultan but with the monarchist-

capitalist cliques of the Balkan states and with the division of Macedonia between them.” (T. Organdzhiev, 123-124.)

There is no doubt that the leaders of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, who were preparing for the upcoming Uprising, were deeply dissatisfied with the Gemidzhii. It was easy to see that the “Solun assassinations” had a negative effect on the preparations for the Uprising. The MRO leaders certainly did not hide their dissatisfaction. Earlier we saw how Damian Gruev reacted during the Smilevo Congress. In their memoirs Tatarchev, Sandanski, Garvanov and almost all the other leaders, and they were not few, made their feelings known. And at the same time, they viewed the Solun assassinations as insignificant. But those events were not insignificant or too small to be ignored.

What we don’t know is how Anastas Lozanchev, chairman of the District Committee, reacted during the Smilevo Congress, who, as we mentioned earlier, was one of those leaders who had the highest merit for enforcing the uprising. In his later writings (1937), Lozanchev, in fact, like almost all the others who wrote about the Solun assassinations, expressed his admiration for the Gemidzhii and their work: “A group of young people who called themselves ‘Gemidzhii’, almost children, decided to die for the freedom of Macedonia. No matter which god they served, their ideals were their own - breaking the shackles of slavery in Macedonia... It was a great feat! It was great work! Where should we look for them in history? I believe there is no such heroism anywhere, such self-denial and such self-sacrifice...” (Anastas Lozanchev, *Memoirs*, 26-29 - INI, fig. IV, 68.)

When it comes to the Gemidzhii, a small distance in time was enough, for even those who could hardly forget the consequences of their actions suddenly came to the conclusion that everything for which they had been “reprimanded” at the time, faded away before the greatness of their spirits and before the tragedy of their deaths. There were numerous Macedonian revolutionaries, from the oldest to the newest history who, without thinking, sacrificed their lives when they were placed in a situation to seek freedom or death... But it was not the same with the Gemidzhii. They did not place themselves in a situation where they could choose freedom. Their

mission was to perform their tasks and die doing them. Death for them was not to be avoided but to be demanded. And they volunteered to find it. “This is how they expressed their love for their Macedonian homeland and gave their fellow countrymen the most outstanding example of self-sacrifice.” (Silianov, 262.)

With a sense of pride the Macedonian generations that follow remember the many famous and unknown heroes who unselfishly gave their lives for Macedonia’s freedom. They, of course, with a feeling of special piety are remembering those young Macedonians who, in the First and Second Ilinden, at the battlefield of their homeland gave their lives, feeling courageous and bold. Included among those are also the Gemidzhii who linked their young lives to their work, believing that they had no right to survive their action and their innocent victims. This is why they consciously and rebelliously rectified themselves before enemy guns or committed suicide.

Let us once again mention their names: “Ortse, Kosta, Dime, Vlado, Ilia, Tsvetko...”