



## MACEDONIAN HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT INTERNATIONAL

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### **Bulgarian Media Sets New Low for Publicly Sanctioned Racism Against Macedonians**

#### **Macedonian Human Rights Movement International**

##### **Press Release - September 19, 2006**

The Bulgarian media, namely, the Focus News Agency, has set a new low in the country's publicly sanctioned racism, xenophobia and intolerance toward its Macedonian minority. On September 12, 2006, Focus referred to OMO Ilinden PIRIN as "separatists", and claimed that the party paid individuals to sign up to become members. In order for a political party to register legally in Bulgaria it is required to obtain 5,000 members. This law was introduced in Bulgaria just before the European Court of Human Rights ruled against the Bulgarian government and ordered it to unconditionally allow the legal registration of the party. Since OMO Ilinden PIRIN announced that it had signed up more than 5,000 members and planned to register in the Sofia Court, Focus has engaged in a campaign of slander and defamation of the Macedonian minority party. Focus' unfounded claims led to Bulgarian politicians denouncing the Macedonian party and threatening legal ramifications in an effort to prevent its registration. Following are examples of the hysteria that ensued which are indicative of a country that views itself as a western democracy worthy of EU membership but consistently proves itself to be the very antithesis of one.

In an interview for Focus, VMRO leader Krasimir Karakachanov said *"On Monday VMRO will alarm the Prosecutor in Chief and the Regional Prosecutor's office in Blagoevgrad on the collection of signatures in return for money."*

According to Focus, the Chief Secretary of Party Order, Lawfulness and Justice Yane Yanev, *"Will plead in court against registration of OMO Ilinden – Pirin".* Yanev said *"Bulgaria is a state and not unfenced yard. The group that is laundering money buying people in order to establish some kind of political formation with unclear aims is just wasting their time"*.

Eliana Maseva, member of the political party "Democrats for Strong Bulgaria" said *"Buying votes is inadmissible from both a legal and moral point of view"* and added *"...the Criminal Code already contains texts that incriminate such actions."*

Union of Democratic Forces member Filip Dimitrov said that *"buying votes"* is *"indictable"*.

According to Focus, *"The fact that OMO Ilinden-Pirin seeks the support of organizations which not only do not reject terrorism but use it as well is very indicative – after OMO Ilinden-Pirin contacts such organizations they become a part of them."* This is in response to OMO Ilinden PIRIN's meeting in Bulgaria with the European Free Alliance, an organization that is a member of the European Parliament and which visited Bulgaria in order to report on human rights violations against the Macedonian minority. Focus continued, *"Krasimir Karakachanov joked that he wouldn't be surprised if OMO Ilinden-Pirin invite Osama bin Laden himself. OMO Ilinden-Pirin 'also have an extremist way of thinking because they want to separate the region of*



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*Blagoevgrad from Bulgaria', the VMRO-BND leader added. He advised that the illegal party should not be underestimated and should not be allowed to hold separatist activities in Bulgaria."*

Furthermore, on Saturday, September 9th, Botjo Vangelov, a member of OMO Ilinden PIRIN, was arrested and detained by police in Blagoevgrad where he was interrogated by state secret police for several hours. Prior to being detained, documents relating to the registration process of OMO Ilinden PIRIN were confiscated.

MHRMI calls on the international community to condemn Bulgaria's state-sponsored acts of oppression, and demand that Bulgaria immediately recognize its large Macedonian minority and grant it the human rights that it is guaranteed by all international human rights conventions. Moreover, MHRMI calls on the European Union to enforce the European Court of Human Rights October 20, 2005 decision in favour of OMO Ilinden PIRIN's immediate registration and to make Bulgaria's accession to the EU explicitly conditional on its recognition of its Macedonian minority.

### **Bill Nicholov, President**

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## **MHRMI Condemns Defamation of Ethnic Macedonians by Bulgarian Media**

### **Macedonian Human Rights Movement International**

#### **Press Release - September 14, 2006**

Macedonian Human Rights Movement International (MHRMI) condemns the Focus News Agency's constant defamation of Macedonian minority political party OMO Ilinden PIRIN. Focus is notorious for its anti-Macedonian rhetoric and frequently incites Bulgarians to condemn any expression of Macedonian identity. Macedonians are consistently arrested, detained, threatened, and even beaten.

In its most recent attack on September 12, 2006, Focus referred to OMO Ilinden PIRIN as "separatists", and claimed that the party paid individuals to sign up to become members. In order for a political party to register legally in Bulgaria it is required to obtain 5,000 members. This law was introduced in Bulgaria just before the European Court of Human Rights ruled against the Bulgarian government and ordered it to unconditionally allow the legal registration of OMO Ilinden PIRIN. Focus' unfounded claims led to Bulgarian politicians denouncing the Macedonian



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party and threatening legal ramifications. Eliana Maseva, member of the political party "Democrats for Strong Bulgaria" said *"Buying votes is inadmissible from both a legal and moral point of view"* and added *"...the Criminal Code already contains texts that incriminate such actions."* Union of Democratic Forces member Filip Dimitrov said that *"buying votes"* is *"indictable"*. Responding to the June 2006 Congress of OMO Ilinden PIRIN, Blagoevgrad Mayor Lazar Prickapov said, *"Macedonians should go to Macedonia. Such assembly [of Macedonians in Bulgaria] is illegal."* The Focus News Agency quoted Bulgarian MEP Boris Jacey, *"The competent authorities should undertake measures. If ordered, the members of VMRO BND will hamper any provocation targeted at Bulgaria's national security and sovereignty."*

MHRMI calls on the international community, and specifically the European Union, to apply pressure on Bulgaria to end its state-sponsored acts of oppression and to immediately recognize its large Macedonian minority and grant it the human rights that it is guaranteed by all international human rights conventions. Moreover, MHRMI calls on the European Union to make Bulgaria's accession to the EU explicitly conditional on its recognition of its Macedonian minority.

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### **MHRMI Calls on Bulgarian Authorities to Respect Freedom of Assembly for Upcoming Macedonian Commemoration**

#### **Macedonian Human Rights Movement International**

##### **Press Release - July 21, 2006**

On July 30, 2006 in Mosomishkite Banji, Bulgaria, (near the city of Gotse Delchev) Macedonian organizations and their supporters will gather to commemorate Ilinden, the Macedonian uprising against the Ottoman Empire in 1903.

Macedonians in Bulgaria continuously face discrimination and intimidation when asserting their ethnic Macedonian identity and have been arrested, detained, threatened and even beaten. During this event last year, the Bulgarian ultra-nationalist parliamentary party "VMRO-BND" organized a group of armed individuals with clubs and sticks that confronted the Macedonian celebrants evidently with the intent to harass, intimidate and possibly attack, the Macedonians at the event.



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MHRMI calls on the international community, and specifically the European Union, to apply pressure on Bulgaria to put an end to its state-sponsored acts of oppression and to immediately recognize its large Macedonian minority and grant it the human rights that it is guaranteed by all international human rights conventions. Moreover, MHRMI calls on the European Union to make Bulgaria's accession to the EU explicitly conditional on its recognition of its Macedonian minority.

MHRMI also calls on international media, human rights organizations and other interested parties to attend this event to monitor Bulgaria's compliance with its legal obligations to protect its minority's rights.

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### **MHRMI Condemns Bulgaria's Racist Coverage of Macedonian Party Congress**

#### **Macedonian Human Rights Movement International**

#### **Press Release - June 28, 2006**

Bulgarian politicians and media are in an uproar following the congress of Macedonian political party OMO Ilinden PIRIN. The party called for the Macedonian language to be taught in schools and news to be broadcast in Macedonian on Bulgarian state television. On its website, the Focus News Agency referred to this as the "Scandal of the Day" and stated:

*"Bulgarian politicians, public figures and linguists agreed on the thesis that there is no such thing as Macedonian language and that it is just a dialect of the Bulgarian language. The chairman of the Discrimination Protection Committee Kemal Eyup said that OMO Ilinden - Pirin may demand Macedonian language to be taught in schools only if they prove they are a minority."*

Furthermore, Focus reported that:

*"The chairman of the parliamentary Commission on Civil Society and Media Ivo Atanasov stated that the demand aims at imposing the thesis that there is a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. On*



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*the other hand, the opinion of the historian Panteley Pantev was that OMO Ilinden-Pirin brings cultural, linguistic and ethnic corrosion to Bulgaria."*

Macedonians in Bulgaria continuously face discrimination and intimidation when asserting their ethnic Macedonian identity. As a country that is preparing to enter the European Union, Bulgaria must respect its minorities' human rights and put an end to its state-endorsed acts of oppression.

MHRMI calls on the international community, and specifically the European Union, to apply pressure on Bulgaria to immediately recognize its large Macedonian minority and grant it the human rights that it is guaranteed by all international human rights conventions. Moreover, MHRMI calls on the European Union to make Bulgaria's accession to the European Union explicitly conditional on its recognition of its Macedonian minority.

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### **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 19 September – 30 September 2005, Warsaw**

#### **Working Session 14: National Minorities - 28 September 2005**

#### **Presentation by Macedonian Human Rights Movement International**

Distinguished Moderator and Representatives:

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you the current situation of the Macedonian minority in Greece, Bulgaria and Albania. Greece and Bulgaria vigorously deny the existence of the Macedonian minority on their territory and attempt to suppress any voices that advocate human rights. Albania only recognizes the existence of the Macedonian minority in a small area of the country. Following are several examples of the restrictions on freedom of expression and the media, and freedom of association and the right of peaceful assembly imposed on the Macedonian minority.

#### **Freedom of Expression and the Media**

On August 14, 2005, a Greek daily newspaper censored an article by writer Thanasis Triaridis entitled "A short note on a banned language", which summarised the history and the reasons for



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the prohibition on speaking Macedonian in Greece, as well as Greece's refusal to recognise national minorities. The author concluded that it was time to lift the ban and teach the language with its songs and its literature at the schools in the areas where the language is spoken.

On June 2, 2005, Greek authorities refused to issue accreditation to three Macedonian journalists working for the television station A1 (based in the Macedonian capital of Skopje) who wanted to travel to northern Greece to meet with members of the region's Macedonian minority.

On June 4, 2004, police entered the premises of the private radio station Makedonikos Ichos (Macedonian Sound) in Naoussa/Negush, ceased the transmitting and arrested the owner, Aris Vottaris. The official explanation was that this radio station has no licence for local or regional transmission. Vottaris was released after a few hours, but there were charges pressed against him because of illegal transmission and lack of documents. Vottaris is a Macedonian and was often transmitting traditional songs and dances in Macedonian language, as well as using Macedonian language on air.

### **Freedom of Association and the Right of Peaceful Assembly**

On December 1, 2004, two ethnic Macedonian citizens of Albania, Jani Nesto (40) and Sotir Nestor (40) from the village of Pustec, were heavily wounded while coming under gunfire by an armed Albanian gang, who proceeded to shoot at them and their vehicles with Kalashnikov assault rifles while the two were making their way home from Korca.

According to Edmond Temelko, the president of the "Prespa Society" – the organization which protects the rights of the ethnic Macedonian minority in Albania – this has been the third such incident in the last year.

*"We believe that these violent armed attacks are based purely upon political motives, aimed at scaring the Macedonians of Mala Prespa. We contacted the police in Korca and the Helsinki Committee in Albania because of this gross violation of human rights and freedoms of the Macedonians of Albania and we expect the relevant institutions to undertake the necessary steps to protect the freedoms of mobility and property and the lives of the Macedonians of Albania."*

Macedonians in Bulgaria continuously face discrimination and intimidation when asserting their ethnic Macedonian identity. On July 31, 2005 in Betalovoto, Bulgaria, several Macedonian organizations gathered for an annual Macedonian commemoration but were confronted by armed Bulgarian nationalists. Despite a history of violence by Bulgarian ultra-nationalists against ethnic Macedonians the Bulgarian government chose not to provide security for the event.

MHRMI calls on the international community, and specifically the European Union, to apply pressure on Bulgaria to immediately recognize its large Macedonian minority and grant it the human rights that it is guaranteed by all international human rights conventions. Moreover,



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MHRMI calls on the European Union to make Bulgaria's accession to the European Union explicitly conditional on its recognition of its Macedonian minority.

The European Court of Human Rights convicted Greece for a violation of freedom of association in the case of Sideropoulos and others vs. Greece in 1998 for failing to register the Home of Macedonian Culture. Despite repeated attempts since then, the Home of Macedonian Culture (HMC) has encountered numerous obstacles in trying to register the association. On January 20, 2005, the European Free Alliance protested to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg about ongoing human rights abuses in Greece. Bernat Joan, the Catalan Euro-MP and Vice President of the European Free Alliance stated:

*"I was very concerned to hear this news of ongoing intolerance by Greek authorities. It seems to me a flagrant abuse of basic human rights, not to mention treaty commitments. Greece has fallen foul of the European Court of Human Rights in the past yet this seems to have had little impact on the attitude of the Greek authorities.*

*They must recognise the right to peaceful and free association without interference or oppression. It is ironic that at a time when the EU is asking countries who want to join to implement the so-called 'Copenhagen criteria' which includes the protection of minorities, some existing EU members behave in such a way."*

EFA-Rainbow, the political party of the Macedonian minority in Greece, was forced to cancel its congress twice in 2003 because of threats received from Greek Neo-Nazi organizations. EFA-Rainbow is a legal political party in Greece and did not receive any guarantees of security by Greek police, nor did the Greek government intervene despite repeated appeals by various international organizations. No Greek media or politicians denounced the threats by the Neo-Nazi organizations. Moreover, several media outlets actually praised the Neo-Nazi threats!

Because of mounting pressure against Greece, EFA-Rainbow was finally able to hold its congress on May 30, 2004. However, Greece has become a breeding ground for Neo-Nazism because of its tolerance, and even promotion, of racism and discrimination against minority groups. This culminated in a gathering of various European Neo-Nazi groups in Greece on September 16-18, 2005.

Greece continues to blacklist ethnic Macedonian human rights activists and political refugees. The most recent example is Gjorgi Plukovski, a Canadian citizen of Macedonian descent, born in Harala, Kastoria, Greece (Pozdivishta, Kostur in Macedonian) who was denied entry into Greece when attempting to enter from the Republic of Macedonia on August 4, 2005, and given a document by border officials stating that he *"is considered to be a threat to public order, internal security, public health or the international relations of one or more of the Member States of the European Union"*.



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Mr. Plukovski was rejected at the Greek border despite the fact that he had entered Greece by way of Italy a month earlier, on July 6, 2005 and remained in Greece until July 24, 2005. If Mr. Plukovski were truly a “threat to internal security”, Greece would share its blacklist with other Schengen Treaty member states to ensure that he is unable to enter any such states. However, Greece refuses to admit that its blacklist consists merely of ethnic Macedonians who publicly call for Greece to recognize its significant ethnic Macedonian minority and respect their human rights.

Macedonian Human Rights Movement International calls on the international community to demand that Greece end its racist and xenophobic policy of discriminating against individuals of Macedonian ethnicity. MHRMI also calls on Greece to address immediately the issue of the thousands of Macedonian refugees from the Greek Civil War who were specifically excluded from the general amnesty of 1982 because they were not “Greek by genus”. MHRMI specifically asks that the EU end its hypocrisy in demanding that new member states respect human rights standards while ignoring human rights violations within the EU.

**Ireneusz Slupkowski**

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