

Milan Ristovic

The Bulkes Experiment: A “Greek Republic” in Yugoslavia 1945-1949

The Varkiza Peace Agreement on February 1945 ends communist insurgency which started in December on the streets of Athens. The Agreement which included disarmament of ELAS units and amnesty should create conditions for political solution of the Greek crisis. But, for several thousand most radical ELAS members the new situation was unacceptable and was equal to capitulation. Therefore, they preferred to emigrate¹.

Most chose Yugoslavia as their destination where they joined the already present refugee groups, while the others went to Bulgaria and Albania. Most of them were ELAS members from frontier areas, predominantly Greeks, but also numerous Slavo- Macedonians.

Reception and permanent camps have been organized for emigrants and refugees, primarily in the territory of the Yugoslav People's Republic of Macedonia (YPR Macedonia). In May 1945 a temporary reception camp for ELAS refugees was organized in town of Kumanovo. From this camp 1454 persons were transferred to the North in the Autonomous Province of Voivodina on May 25th². Military authorities, local civilian authorities as well as local “mass organizations” took care of providing initial accommodation, clothing and footwear, as well as medical care for the refugees. These groups, along with the newcomers, were the core from which a “Greek commune” emerged in the vicinity of Novi Sad, in the former German village of Bulkes.

1. R. Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 137.

2. Ministarstvo inostranih poslova (Ministry of Foreign Affairs=MIP), Politicka arhiva (Political Archive=PA), Grcka (Greece), f 21, d 1, 2745, K. Petrushev Minister of Interiors of the PR Macedonia K. Petrushev to the Federal Minsitry of Interiors, Nr. 4008, 20 VI 1945.

In the propaganda war with neighboring Yugoslavia, Bulkes became the quintessence of “communist evil” for the royal government in Athens. The village and its temporary inhabitants became renowned and attracted the attention of international press, various international commissions, intelligence and diplomacy. Bulkes became particularly important at the time of the outbreak of the Yugoslav-Soviet conflict. Fierce discussion about the fate of its inhabitants was conducted in 1948 and 1949 between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the Communist Party of Greece, which ended in late summer of 1949 with the evacuation of the village.

Transfer of refugees to Voivodina and establishment of the refugee community, according to one claim, was the result of an appeal and request of the Communist Party of Greece from the Yugoslav Communist Party leadership³. The whole operation was conducted under the supervision of the State Security Service (UDB)⁴. After brief stopover in Novi Sivec, 2,702 refugees were transferred to Bulkes in early June 1945 and provided accommodation in 625 vacant houses⁵. The villagers included primarily ELAS leaders and guerrillas, as well as activists of its political organizations with their families⁶.

The number of village inhabitants varied: for some of the refugees this village was a center from which they went to other places in Voivodina. The Yugoslav authorities returned 96 (suspicious) persons to Greece⁷. In an official Yugoslav publication about the refugee issue from the beginning of 1949 a number of “about 6,000 Greeks” is mentioned⁸. Documents do not confirm that the number of inhabitants in the village has ever been so high⁹. It mainly ranged between 3,000

3. R. Kirjazovski, *Makedoncite i odnosile na KPJ i KPG (1945-1949). Oficijalni dokumenti so komentari*, (Macedonians and the Relations between YCP and GCP (1945-1949). Official Documents), Skopje 1995, p. 10.

4. General Jovo Kapicic to the Belgrade magazine, *Krug*”, 7, 1999.

5. D. Kljatic, *Izgubljena pobeda generala Markosa. Gradanski rat u Grckoj 1946-1949. i KPJ*, (General Marko’s Lost Victory. Civil War in Greece 1946-1949 and YCP), Beograd, 1987, p. 189.

6. R. Kirjazovski, *Makedonice...*, p. 10.

7. Arhiv Jugoslavije (Archive of Yugoslavia=AJ), CK SKJ, KMOV, Grcka, IX, 33/V, 246-267, 1946-1973, k-14, Elaborat o izbegilaca iz Egejske Makedonije.

8. *Jugoslavia za izbeglice - La Yougoslavie pour les réfugiés de Grece*, Beograd 1949, Crveni krst Jugoslavije, p. 12.

9. This number quotes R. Kirjazovski, *Makedoncite...* p. 10.

and 3,500. Bulkes reached the highest number of inhabitants that can be evidenced in June 1946 - 4,023 persons¹⁰. However, it is assumed that at the end of the Bulkes “commune” in the summer of 1949 it numbered some 4,500 inhabitants¹¹.

A former Bulkes inhabitant, testifying after his return to Greece and arrest, said that refugees have been divided into groups (initially 35), each of 30 to 100 members¹². A group of Slavic Macedonians of about 250 persons left the village in the spring of 1946. At the beginning of January 1946, groups have been created consisting of intellectuals (Group No. 6)¹³ and j “agricultural groups” (Group No. 14). Group No. 16 consisted of women who attended nursing courses.

A Yugoslav Red Cross publication stated that “the main law of this community is that (...) anyone capable of working must work”¹⁴. The Bulkes inhabitants were allocated 3,500 acres of land in 1946 with a hope that the village could produce at least a portion of its necessary food. Until then, the village has been supplied with food from the 3rd Army warehouses in Novi Sad. Agricultural produce from the land allocated to the village have been turned over to the Yugoslav state. Full control of the village was transferred to refugee bodies in August 1946, rationing was abolished and the village was allowed to keep whatever it produced¹⁵.

The majority of the able-bodied persons (about 2,000) worked in agriculture, which was collectivist from the very beginning. Some of the villagers worked in Novi Sad and Sombor¹⁶. The Bulkes agricultural

10. S. f.n.7, *ibid*.

11. “Borba”, 5. IX 1949, “Spekulantski podvizi i teor Zaharijadisovih ljudi nad grckim izbeglicama u Buljkesu” (“Speculations and terror of Zahariadis’s followers to the Greek Refugees in Bulkes”). In this article number of 6.000 was quoted with intenton of the Bulkes Board to receive more suplies from the Yugoslav authorities. Number of 6000 inhabitants also qutes D. Kljakic, *Izgubljena pobeda generala Markosa*, p. 189.

12. Arhiv Vojske Jugoslavije (Yugoslav Military Archive=AVJ), General Staf (=GS), dos. br. OB 148, r. br. 5/1, f-3, str. 9, Obavestajna sluzba (Intelligence service of 4th Infantry division) 4. pesadijske divizije br. 7 (do 20. XII 1946). Captured British document about hearing of Kleon Toleos-Zaharopoulos, from Seres.

13. Later this group was dismissed and members sent lo different duties. The witness stated that in November 1946. were «about 3000 people».

14. *Jugoslavia za izbeglice*, p. 12.

15. S. f.n. 12, *Ibid*.

16. Toleos told that 1946 about 300 members of Bulkes community worked in Novi Sad and the same number in town of Sombor; s. f.n. 12, *ibid*.

estate got its livestock as well (cattle, pigs, sheep), as well as some farm machinery. Poultry farms as well as rabbit farms have been founded. This has considerably improved the situation in the village compared with the first months, as Veselinka Malinska, deputy in the Assembly of the Yugoslav People's Republic of Macedonia described in the report to the Yugoslav Government. She had an impression that life in the village was well organized and that the inhabitants were in "good and optimistic mood".

Various courses, entertainment and cultural events have been organized, but the village lacked fuel for winter and draft animals. She also noted that a group of about 150 refugees were inclined to the Greek Government and supported "the English policy toward it". She reported affirmatively about the relations between the Greeks and (Slav-Macedonians. Those who demanded to be transferred to the People's Republic of Macedonia, where they had relatives, were accused by their peers as "deserters"¹⁷.

Quite a different impression of relations in Bulkes can be found in the report of Arbadzis Kalikratis of 2 November 1945, written for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of YPR Macedonia, in which he provides a detailed analysis of profound differences in the approach to the settlement of the "Macedonian question" between the Greeks and the Slav-Macedonians, but also among Slav-Macedonians themselves¹⁸.

Founding of the Bulkes "commune" created conditions for carrying out a radical "social experiment" that could corroborate the correctness of ideological and political argumentation about the advantages of the collectivist model. The closed character of the community and its exclusion from the Yugoslav environment, regardless of very similar processes (collectivization, cooperatives, etc.) allows that it be considered as a separate "Greek communist experiment".

Bulkes was governed with "strong arm" by the Board, headed until mid-1947 by the Greek Communist Party activist Mihalis Paktasidis¹⁹.

17. AJ, A CK SKJU, KMOV, Gr~ka, IX, 33/V- 248 - 267, k- 14, 1946 -1973, Veselinka Malinska, M.P of the Parlament of Peoples Republic of Makedonia to Milar Bakic, Sekretary of the Presidency of the Yugoslav Federal Government, 11. XI 1945;, M. Mitrovic, 190.

18. Ibid.

19. R. Kirjazovski, *Makedoncite...* p. 52.

"The President (of the Board) in 1947 was Mihail Terzis²⁰ (In 1948-1949 Lefteros Matsukas and in 1949 Mihailos Sustas). The president, other local governing officials and the party committee were appointed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece. The Board coordinated all economic activities via the administration of the farmers' cooperative and two directorates (Directorate for Agriculture and Main Directorate for Workshops). The Board had its "chief commercial representative" in Novi Sad²¹.

The authorities in Bulkes had an efficient "executive organ" - their own security service, an instrument of continuous control, repression and arbitrariness. This political "self-government" and non-interference of the Yugoslav authorities (at least not direct) have contributed to the fact that Bulkes was referred to as "the seventh republic" in Yugoslavia.

Idyllic descriptions in reports about the first months in Bulkes and propaganda texts about the "new life" concealed discontent about the way in which this community has been governed from the beginning. In addition, internal cleavages have been continuously present. In a very harsh criticism of the situation (November 1945) with which the Yugoslav authorities have been acquainted, G. Karanikolas reminded that before leaving for Vojvodina the leadership promised that "...living conditions will improve", that they "will be given apartments and schools will be opened"²². But, "quarrelling began as soon as they arrived". The new villagers were forced to go and work in the fields. Those who did not go did not get food, with the slogans: "Those who do not work are helping fascism" and "Those who do not work are not fighting for the national cause". Physical conflicts occurred and some "factionists" attacked some of the prominent ELAS officers. Karanikolaos accused the leadership that it "immediately prohibited Bulkes inhabitants to communicate with Serbs and with out female comrades". Escapes started and he fled as well, but the Yugoslav authorities caught him without traveling permit and returned him to the village, where ITO (security service) arrested him. While in prison, he witnessed brutal beating of other prisoners. He also drew attention to different living conditions of officials and of ordinary inhabitants²³.

20. AJ , A-CK SKJ, KMOV, Grcka, Ix, 33/V-248-267, 1946-1973, K-14, Work of the Subcommission in Bulkes, 2. IV 1947.

21. D. Kljakic, p. 189.

22. AJ A-CK, SKJ, KMOV, Grika, 1946 - 1973, IX, 33/V-248-267, k-14, 11493, Report of G. Karanikolaos about Bulkes-Voivodina,, Skopje 2. XI 1945.

23. Ibid.

In summer and autumn 1945 the Yugoslav authorities allowed foreign journalists to visit Bulkes. Permission for these visits was granted primarily in order to make the West change its opinion that it is in fact a “military camp” closed for the foreigners where its inhabitants are kept under oppression. Soviet, American, French, Swiss and Czech journalists visited the village²⁴.

The inhabitants had the opportunity to work in workshops (making clothing and footwear) with the idea to meet part of the demand of the population and offer surplus to the Yugoslav market. The village also had a factory for hemp processing. For then Yugoslav circumstances, the workshops have been well-equipped with machines and tools. A farmers’ cooperative was founded in 1946. The community had its own hospital with 54 employees (physicians and other personnel)²⁵.

The Greek printing shop with 20 typographers and technicians was of great propaganda importance. It printed the paper *Foni tou Boulkes* which was published three times a week, *Warrior* - the paper of the Communist Party of Greece and *Ta eatoupoula* - a monthly for children, as well as schoolbooks, handbooks, propaganda literature and occasionally a literary translation²⁶. Bulkes had a primary school and a junior high school with instruction in Greek, a bookstore, a theater, a hospital and a cinema. The village also had an orphanage for children up to three years of age. Voluntary working brigades also went from the village to build Brcko-Banovici and Samac-Sarajevo railways²⁷.

In 1946, there were 14 professors, 43 teachers, 32 agricultural engineers, 6 physicians, 18 officers, 25 musicians, as much as 300 cooks and waiters, 320 shepherds among the refugees. Regardless of their former occupations, the villagers were primarily (former) ELAS commanders and soldiers, whose significance and combat experience since the beginning of the civil war in Greece in 1946 was of high importance for the rebel Democratic Army of Greece (DAG).

24. M1P, PA, Grcka, 1947, f-43, d-6, 42692, V. Velebit to J. Djerdja (Athens), 14.11 1947.

25. Momcilo Mitrovic “Egejski Makcedonci u Jugoslaviji 1945-1960” (“Aegean Macedonians in Yugoslavia 1945-1960), Tokovi istorije, 3-4/1997, p. 191, tabele.

26. Ibid, p. 189, 190; *Jugoslavia za izbeglice*, p. 13, 14.

27. *Jugoslavia za izbeglice*, p. 12, 13.

In 1946 there were only 161 women and 30 children in the village, including 22 children born in Yugoslavia. By mid-1946 thirteen persons died of various illnesses, consequences of wounding or torture²⁸.

Attempt to make the commune economically self-sufficient and liberate Yugoslav authorities of high maintenance costs soon proved unfeasible. Despite relatively large areas under agricultural crops, the village remained dependent on the food supplied by the Yugoslav Army (formerly 3rd Army Command), Serbian and Voivodina authorities, UNRR and other sources²⁹.

There was an intention to incorporate Bulkes into the planned targets of the Yugoslav economy and the village got its task within the Five-Year Plan. Workshops in the village have been supplied with inputs via the Main Board of the Autonomous Province of Voivodina. Income tax amounting to 5 million dinars was levied on the village in 1948 - but has not been paid. However, supply with clothing, footwear and other necessities remained similar as the situation regarding the supply with food³⁰.

Self-isolation of the Greek refugee community, which was hard to get into and hard to get out of, was exacerbated by the fact that the Board, assuming the role of the “autonomous government”, printed its own money. It was in circulation in the “commune” in the total amount of 9,253,255 dinars³¹. The quantity of “Bulkes dinars” was equal to the total sum of monthly wages of all employees and thus helped create a reserve of the Yugoslav currency which was used in shops outside the village³².

28. AJ, A CK SKJ, KMOV, Grcka, IX, 33/V-248-267, k-14, 1946-1973, Reports about communities in Gakovo, Krusevlje and Bulkesa.

29. AJ A-CK SKJ, KMOV, Gr5ka, IX, 33/V-248-267, 1947-1973, k-14, 13312, deputy minister Jaksa Bogdanovic to the Ministry of Trade and Supplies of the Republic of Serbia, 4. II 1947.

30. M. Mitrovic, p. 193, 194.

31. Arhiv Josipa Broza-Tita (Archive of Josip Broz-Tito=AJBT), I-3-b/279, Monetary and financial activities, (Summer 1949). In the article about Bulkes published in the Party organ “Borba”, “Spekulantski podvizi...” from 5 IX 1949, was stated that at 1st January and at January the 8th 1949 were 7, 173, 735 Dinars, and 8 I was put in circulation additional 1, 988.000 Dinara, and to 30 May additional 91.520 Dinars.

32. M.Mitrovic, p. 189.

What has been carefully hidden from the public view, and what despite that was the main issue in protests and accusations that came from Athens and western countries, was the activity of the military school, where officers for command posts in DAG have been trained. By mid-1946 there were 112 students in this school³³. This “School for General Education”, as it was named, was in fact a system of courses in different military disciplines (at least 4 during a 3-month course). By the beginning of 1947 only, about 600 persons passed through it³⁴. In addition to this secret military school, there was also a party school operating in the village, where 30 to 40 members of the Communist Party of Greece attended courses in semiannual cycles. There were about 2800 Communist Party members in the village in 1947-1948, of whom about 1000 were youth party members³⁵.

After completed training, soldiers and officers have been dispatched from the village to Greece, where they were assigned to DAG units. Thus, two groups of 50 men left Bulkes for Eastern Thrace via Bulgaria, as mentioned in a report from Sofia on 4 November 1946, but Georgi Dimitrov prohibited further transfers via this route³⁶. From preserved documents about the change of man count between June 1946 and March 1947, one can deduce the volume of transfers of the military school course graduates to Greece³⁷.

In the UDB (State Security Service) report (colonel Biljanovic to Rankovic) dated 18 November 1946, precise data have been presented about transfer of materiel and personnel from Yugoslavia to Greece, including those from Bulkes. Colonel Biljanovic quoted that in early November UDB assumed “...full control over transfer of people to the other side, as well as all messenger connections” and that three channels have been organized (via Gevgelia, Doiran and Bitola). Also, that from Bulkes “some 20-25 people arrive for transfer every other day”, who are transferred the same night. He also mentioned that transfer of “240 demobilized KNOJ soldiers, who are from the Aegean Macedonia” has started as well³⁸.

33. AJ, SKJ, KMOV, IX-33/V, Number of the Greeks in Voivodina.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid. M. Mitrovic, p. 189.

36. AJBT, 1-3-b/246, Telegram from Ivan Karaivanov, 4 XI 1946.

37. M. Mitrovic, 189.

38. AJ, A CK SKJ- KMOV, Grecka, IX, 33/VI-1-48, 1942 1947, K-15 colonel Vojo Biljanovic, to minister of internal affairs: Report about transfer of material and man to Greece, 18. XI 1946.

In a letter to Trygve Lie on 3 December 1946, The Greek delegation to the UN accused neighboring countries of assisting guerrilla actions in Greece. It was mentioned that «in the camp in Bulkes, in Voivodina ...in Yugoslavia, operates a military installation that submits recruited persons to the training for guerrilla activities in Greece. These people, some 2500-3000, have been selected by ELAS members who sought refuge in Yugoslavia after the Varkiza Agreement. Among them are many whose arrest has been ordered because they violated the civil law». Some of the Bulkes inhabitants who returned to Greece and were arrested or gave themselves up to the Greek authorities testified in several court trials or before the United Nations Special Commission for the Balkans (UNSCOB) about the existence of military training in Bulkes. The Yugoslav representatives on a number of occasions rejected these accusations as untruthful, e.g. Josip Djerdja at the session of the Inquiry Commission in Athens on 14 February³⁹.

Dynamic communication Bulkes-Greece is also illustrated by cablegrams of “I. Ioanidis-Denisov”, representative of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece in Belgrade⁴⁰. On 4 September 1947 he demanded from Vlko Chervenkov permission for passage through Bulgaria of a group of 50 persons from Bulkes (“like the previous time”) via Petrich. On 5 November 1947 in a letter to “Alkibiad” Denisov drew attention to the fact that “a group of 400 should soon be dispatched from Bulkes” and that a group of 35 persons was expected after completion of a medical course and should urgently be dispatched via Albania⁴¹.

Aggravation of conflict concerning the endorsement of the Information Bureau Resolution resulted in problems and ceasing of further sending to Greece of soldiers from refugee camps in Yugoslavia because of the objection by the Yugoslav authorities. At the meeting in Skopje on 9 February 1949 with M. Porfirogenis, minister in the

39. Dokumenta o spoljnoj politici Jugoslavije, 1/1947, Speech of Yugoslav representative Josip Djerdja before Anqete commission of the UN Security Council 14 II 1947, 301.

40. AJ A CK SKJ, KMOV, Grcka, IX, 33/1- 630-681, 1946-1948, K-5, Denisov to Vlko Chervenkov, 18 XII 1946.

41. AJ A CK SKJ, KMOV, Grcka, IX, 33/1-682-711, 1946 1949, k-6, Denisov (I. Ioanidis) to Vladimirov (V. Chervenkov), 4. IX 1947; AJBT, I-3-b/261, letter from Denisov, 5.11. 1947.

“Provisional Government”, Ilija Dimovski-Goce accused the representatives of the Greek community in Bulkes and representatives of the Communist Party of Greece - DAG in Skopje of sabotaging his effort to recruit 300 Slav-Macedonians for their units in DAG⁴².

The Yugoslav authorities did not allow activists in Bulkes to recruit refugees in refugee camps in YPR Macedonia, nor permitted recruitment of deserters from the Greek Royal Army. They prohibited anyone who wanted to be transferred to Bulkes to go there and even arrested those who were suspected of having connections with Bulkes. In addition, distribution of *Foni tu Bulkes* and *Nepokoreni* was prohibited.

On 15 March 1949 the Yugoslav authorities informed the Commune in Bulkes that prohibition of movement outside the village boundaries had been introduced for its inhabitants and that only the president, vice-president and suppliers could be allowed to go out of the village - after they elaborate the reasons and obtain permission from the authorities. Any contact with the neighboring refugee villages, Gakovo and Krusevlje, where Slav-Macedonians had been transferred from Bulkes in 1948, was prohibited⁴³.

The UN Secretariat released and distributed to all delegations the memorandum of the Greek government that was handed over to UNSCOB on 4 February 1949. It contained reiterated accusations about the existence of liaison centers, hospitals, supply camps and evacuation centers in neighboring countries, mentioning that in Yugoslavia only there were 3,500 well-trained partisans who were reserve for providing assistance to DAG - by which allusion was made to the number of refugees in Bulkes⁴⁴.

A “dialogue of the deaf about the situation in Bulkes and accusations that it was a training camp where ELAS members also brought a certain number of “hostages” against their will was conducted during the work of the Inquiry Commission of the UN Security Council in the first half of 1947. At the Commission meeting in Athens on 5 February 1947 the Greek delegate claimed that “ELAS members who came to Yu-

42. R. Kirjazovski, p. 53.

43. AJ, A SKJ, KMOV, Grcka, IX-33, 1-1-100, K-1, 1942-1957, letter from Spiro (Petros Rousos) to Central Committee of CPY, 1. IV 1949.

44. MIP, PA, Grcka, 1948, f-55, d-8, 41883. “Vradini”, 14 VI 1948.

goslavia after Varkiza brought with them hostages, who are (probably) to be found in the Buljkes camp⁴⁵. Marjan Barisic, a member of the Yugoslav delegation (and State Security Service officer), drew attention to Belgrade that the Commission was particularly interested in Bulkes and that they should get ready for the visit of the Commission to the village. He proposed that "...refugees should be advised to report in large numbers to the Commission and to submit memoranda, protests and petitions in order to ...outnumber possible reactionaries who might try to approach the Commission⁴⁶."

One document of this kind, *The Memorandum of Greek Political Refugees in Yugoslavia to the UN Security Council Inquiry Commission*, was completed on 11 February. In it, in addition to presenting reasons for their fleeing from Greece (war, persecution, torture and terror of "mon-archo-fascist authorities") they stress living conditions in Yugoslavia and establishment of "refugee communities" (Bulkes, Skopje, Bitola and elsewhere). It was particularly emphasized that refugees founded "...working cooperatives, such as e.g. in Bulkes, which contribute toward peaceful development in democratic Yugoslavia". They denied accusations of the Greek government that Bulkes is a "partisans' war base", "military academy" and that "there are Greek hostages in Bulkes". The refugee community in Bulkes sent on 14 February 1946 a memorandum concerning their position to the LIN Refugee Commission, demanding assistance for their repatriation and material aid, but their request remained without an answer⁴⁷.

On 2 April 1947 the Sub-Commission (of the UN Inquiry Commission) arrived to Bulkes where it interviewed witnesses - 6 proposed by the Yugoslav delegate Djerdja and 5 chosen by the Greek delegate. In its statement, president of the community Mihail Terzis said that he was "...speaking on behalf of 3200 men, women and children, refugees from Greece, who are now in Buljkes and (that he was) the head of (their) delegation; that "the inhabitants authorized him

45. AJ, A-CK SKJ, KMOV, GrtSka, IX, 33/V-248 264, 1946-1973, Nr. 3025, Report from Barisic Marjan, Athens, 5 II 1947.

46. Ibid.

47. AJ, A-CK SKJ, KMOV, Grcka, IX-33/V-248-267, 1946-1973, K-14, 11317, Memo of the Greek political refugees in Yugoslavia to UN Securty Councils' Anquet Commission, Belgrade, 11. II 1947.

to once for all, before the Inquiry Commission, ...deny and refute false information about Bulkes fabricated by Greek representatives”⁴⁸. He confirmed that Zahariades came into village and that he “only talked about the situation in Greece”. Other witnesses did not hide that Nikos Zahariadis visited Bulkes and delivered a speech in which he invited them to get ready to go back to their fatherland when it was necessary. Terzis refuted claims that Bulkes was a military camp where military training was conducted, and confirmed that “Bulkes inhabitants have never received any help from the Yugoslav Army, either in clothing or in food”. He said that there were only refugee families in the village and that 3,200 inhabitants include also 205 children, mainly orphans⁴⁹. The Commission “did not find any trace of military activity” and it was concluded “that military training has been ceased”. In the proposal of Commission conclusions American representatives claimed that refugees have been “subjected to political preparation and propaganda” with the aim of “toppling the Greek government”⁵⁰. Investigating the role of Albania in providing assistance to DAG, the Commission discovered that a camp for Greek refugees existed from autumn 1945 to October 1946 in the village of Rubig, 50 miles north of Tirana, where military training was also conducted. It was ceased in October 1946 when the inhabitants of the Rubig camp have been transferred to Bulkes⁵¹.

Some inhabitants of Bulkes came there after wandering in other countries. This was the case with two former ELAS members from Athens and Piraeus. They left Greece in 1945 and went to Soviet Union and from there, via Romania, came to Bulkes. A group of 30 Greek sailors, expelled from Argentina because of their political convictions, got asylum in Yugoslavia and were placed in Bulkes⁵².

48. AJ, A-CK SKJ, KMOV, Grcka, IX, 33/V-248-267, 1946-1973, K-14, UN Commission in Buljkes, 2 IV 1947.

49. Ibid.

50. AJBT, I-3-b/270, Project of American conclusion, 1947.

51. MIP, PA, Grcka, 1947, f-43, d-46709, Sehovic (Athens) to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 III 1947.

52. MIP, PA, Grcka, 1949, f-40, d-1 1, 413914, pov. br. 814/48, France Pirc (Buenos Aires) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19. XII 1948; “Borba”, 5. IX 1949, “Speculations and terror of Zahariadis’ followers...”

Certain former inhabitants of Bulkes testified at the trial to 135 arrested DAG members in Thessaloniki in the spring of 1948. Thus, witness “captain” Theodoros Pilatos came to Yugoslavia and Bulkes in March 1947. He said that in Bulkes prevails dictatorship and that military missions went there and groups of partisans went from there to Greece⁵³.

By mid-August 1947 numerous articles appeared in the Greek press with allegations about the transfer of a large number of “leaders” from Yugoslavia to Greece. Thus, Athens paper *Katimerini* wrote on 12 August about the “invasion of leaders” who entered Greek territory in July “...coming from Bulkes”. The paper mentioned that this referred to a large group of 355 persons appointed to the headquarters of certain sectors⁵⁴.

The end of the “Bulkes commune” began with the outbreak of the conflict between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and Cominform. Leaders of the Communist Party of Greece and DAG, after some hesitation, largely supported the latter, and those in Buljkes followed suit. In June 1948 Zahariadis went to Moscow and on 15 June before the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union presented his view of relations between the Communist Party of Greece and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, accusing the Yugoslav party and state leadership for interference into the internal affairs of the Greek Party. Zahariadis particularly accused Aleksandar Rankovic of receiving “a high-ranking official of the Communist Party of Greece” Mihalis Pektasidis (until mid-1947 he was the president of the Board in Bulkes, and then head of the 2nd Bureau for Military Security of the DAG Headquarters). Pektasidis was accused of maintaining close relations with “Yugoslav comrades” that he “deserted from DAG” and went to Rankovic⁵⁵. That was a sign of profound cleavage among the leadership and members of the Bulkes “commune”.

53. MIP, PA, Grcka, 1948, f-58, d-12, 412765, pov. br. 86. Process against the group of “captured partisans” in Thessaloniki, Consluat general in Thesaloniki to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26. IV 1948.

54. MIP, PA, Groka, 1947, f-40, d-12, 415398, Provocations against Yugoslavia, Athens, 12 VIII 1947.

55. AJ, A-CK, SKJ, KMOV, Grcka, IX, 33/1-1-100, Letter of Mihail (Paktasidisa) to A. Rankovic, 8 VI 1948; R. R. Kirjazovski, *Macedoncite...* p. 60.

Aleksandar Rankovic urgently informed Tito on 7 June 1948 of the problems with the Greek party leadership and the situation at the border. He thought that “Greeks ...in Bulkes should be allowed to leave if they wish so. Their departure would be actually beneficial to us, because leadership in Bulkes is in the hands of thieves and enemies of our country”, who have inflicted great “material and economic” harm to us and the report about that would follow. He stressed that “Macedonians and Macedonian children do not want to leave Yugoslavia, which the Greek leadership is well aware of but that there are indications that “they will start a campaign against us on this issue as well”⁵⁶.

Zahariadis was warned from Belgrade on 28 August that A. Matsukas and his supporters in Bulkes “act hostile toward Yugoslavia recently”⁵⁷. The Yugoslav leadership stressed that they did not want to interfere into “internal affairs in Bulkes” and had nothing “against their choice to support the Cominform Resolution”, but that they would not be allowed to “harangue against our party and country, to slander and insult them before our citizens, nor to take down and throw away Marshall Tito’s pictures in protest”. They warned that the consequences of such relationship are also exhibited in “improper and careless transfer of your people from Bulkes to your country” and that “...joint business cannot be properly developed without mutual understanding and confidence, or without the necessary coordination”. In his answer on 31 August Zahariadis promised that effort will be made to bring Matsukas (Barba Lekso), president of the Bulkes municipality, “into the framework of our line”⁵⁸.

The behavior of Lefteros Matsukas toward Yugoslav authorities and particularly demonstrative removal of Josip Broz’s photograph from official premises was one of the items on the agenda of the talk on 1 October 1948 between the member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece and foreign minister of the Provisional Government Petros Rousos and Aleksandar Rankovic. Matsukas openly stated his support to the Cominform before Yugoslav

56. AJBT, I-3-b/279, br. 380, urgent, A. Rankovic to Tito, 7 VII 1948.

57. AJBT, I-3-b/273, telegram to Vasiiis (Zahariadis) from Vasilis, 28 VIII 1948.

58. Ibid.

officers gave statements against the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, organized a rally in memory of Andrei Zhdanov without the knowledge or presence of the Yugoslav authorities. Due to this, the Yugoslav authorities removed this president of the municipality and expelled him⁵⁹.

Mihalīs Pektasīdis became the most renowned victim of mutual relentless confrontation among the divided Bulkes leaders. As P. Rousos claimed at the meeting with Rankovic on 8 November 1948, Pektasīdis was a “deserter” from DAG since April 1948, expelled from the Communist Party of Greece, “in Bulkes rallied around him anti-party elements” and with a “narrow circle” (of supporters) opted in favor of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia⁶⁰.

Pektasīdis was missing from Bulkes since early November 1948. According to one interpretation, he was liquidated on an island in Danube or dumped into a well in Bulkes. Some other members of the pro-Yugoslav group disappeared from the village in the same way. Prompted by Pektasīdis’s disappearance, the Yugoslav authorities arrested six Bulkes inhabitants on the night between the 6th and 7th November, whose release was demanded in vain by the Communist Party of Greece and DAG leaderships⁶¹.

Rankovic has also shown great interest in mysterious departure from Bulkes in October 1948 of the former Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece member and ELAS delegate in Yugoslavia Andreas Tsīmas. Rousos informed Rankovic that Tsīmas -for whom it was “unknown how he crossed the border” and who had many times left Bulkes without permission - was in the hands of the Hungarian authorities. Zachariadis interpreted his behavior with mental illness⁶².

The «Provisional Democratic Government of Greece» sent a verbal note to the Government of the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia on 1 October 1949 abounding in grave accusations about the conduct toward refugees, particularly in Bulkes. Thus, it was mentioned that the Yugoslav authorities “...using several corrupt elements, even former British Intelligence Service agents, organized

59. R. Kirjazovski, *Macedoncite*...p. 68, 77, 84.

60. *Ibid*, p. 79.

61. *Ibid*.

62. *Ibid*, p. 87

an attack on the community with the intention of none the less than to liquidate the community in Bulkes, which until then ... represented the model of application of work, peace, collective spirit, dedication to struggle”⁶³.

In the summer of 1949, just prior to disbandment of the “Bulkes Commune”, the Yugoslav authorities conducted an audit of their operation. On the report on the financial and treasury operation in Bulkes, Aleksandar Rankovic left a note: “All these and other unlawful actions have been established by our special state control commission and we have already undertaken measures to restore order and respect of our regulations and laws there”. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia informed the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece on 4 July 1949 that the bodies of the State Control Commission in Bulkes found out many irregularities and abuses regarding economic-material and financial operation of the Board, by which damage to the Yugoslav economy has been systematically inflicted. This was confirmed in the separate statement by the commercial representative of Bulkes in Novi Sad, F. Kosmidis, as well as by numerous village inhabitants⁶⁴, it was demanded from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece to send their representative with whom matters would be cleared⁶⁵. According to the decision of the “Provisional Government” it was decided that its minister of health, Dr. Petros Kokalis, should come to Yugoslavia and talk about the problems of Bulkes. In a cablegram of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece dated 8 July it was warned that “...regarding the announced arrival of Kokalis concerning Bulkes, we draw your attention to the fact that up until now we have been resolving issues of this kind solely along the party lines, and we still maintain that position”⁶⁶. Unfortunately, there are no documents in the archives concerning the discussion with Kokalis.

63. MIP, PA, Grcka, 1949, f-38, d-7, 415645, pov. br. 491, Yugoslav Emabssy in Budapest, Translation of the note verbale from Provisional Government of Democratic Greece, 1 VIII 1949.

64. Ibid.

65. AJ, ACK SKJ, KMOV, Grcka 1946-1947, IX, 33/1-682-711, k-6, telegram CK KPJ CK KPG br. 191, 4 VII 1949.

66. Ibid, telegram Nr. 110, CC GCP to CC YCP, 7 VII 1949; ibid, telegram nr. I I CC GCP to CC YCP, 8 VII 1949.

The report on Bulkes, with detailed financial situation, was submitted already in July 1948. Tito was warned of the oppressive behavior of the Bulkes leadership, which did not allow anyone to move out of the village, as documented in 85 testimonies presented to the Yugoslav investigating committee. The leadership “created around them a circle of privileged persons who enjoyed various benefits” and through which they implemented repressive measures, including beating; they forced sick, old people and children to work, those who wanted to leave the village have been harassed; people from the Board have been accused of appropriating money orders and not giving them to the recipients, “thus creating among the refugees an impression that the money has been held by our post”. They “persecute parents who did not allow their children to be sent to the countries of people’s democracies”. In the end it was concluded that the “leadership is basically maintaining hostile attitude toward the FPRY. Every step of the way and in every opportunity they slander our party and state leadership. They try to minimize the importance and assistance our government provided to the struggle of the Greek people, they call us various pejorative names and compare with fascist countries”⁶⁷.

The Board made huge profits by purchasing production inputs for workshops at (limited) state prices and minimum labor costs. High savings and earnings have been obtained by inflated presentation of necessary inputs. Filoklis Kosmidis, the chief commercial representative of the Board, mentioned in his statement that increased number of the population was presented to the Yugoslav authorities for 1948 and that due to this they obtained between 1,000 and 1,500 more ration cards. In the same way they created large stocks of textile and food, which did not improve the living standard of most of the population⁶⁸

Through issue of their own money for paying workers’ wages, they compelled workers to work in Bulkes. In this way, the worker was “... forced to spend all his money in Buljkes, on goods imposed on him and at very high prices”. The Board had a large sum of 12,527,757 dinars in its bank account⁶⁹.

67. AJBT, I-3-b/279, Report about the situation in Bulkes, July 1948.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

Rankovic concluded that “all these and other irregularities have been determined by our special State Control Commission and we have already undertaken specific measures to restore order there and respect of our regulations and laws”. The note, decisive for the further fate of Buljkes, was added by Josip Broz-Tito: “Bulkes to be disbanded and camp for refugees to be organized. To refugees allowed getting employment. They may possess no immovable property⁷⁰.”

The Yugoslav authorities turned down the request of the representatives of the Czechoslovakian and Hungarian embassies to visit Bulkes at the end of July 1949 with a justification that they would like to determine the “population’s health condition” and agree with the Board members about their moving to Czechoslovakia. In a protest telegram sent on behalf of the Board to Tito by the Board’s new president M. Sustas on 29 July 1949, he mentioned that the representative of the Yugoslav authorities (State Security Service) colonel Krstic “described the Bulkes Board as a concentration camp”, although it is well-known that the Board was established in 1946 and was formally recognized by the Yugoslav authorities. Protests have been voiced against the violation of the written promise and procrastination in solving conflicting issues and restricted finances. Also, that the Yugoslav Government “permitted relocation of only 2,400 inhabitants”, while the Board requested permission for over 3,500 persons⁷¹.

On 8 August Sustas sent a memorandum to Tito and Kardelj. Since Yugoslavia closed its border toward Greece and entered into conflict with the “Provisional Government”, the refugee community in Bulkes “...no longer has the possibility to help the fight of our people. At the same time, your authorities have recently created such a situation in our village that can be described as all but friendly”⁷². Such a situation urged us to make “...an irrevocable decision to ask from you ...to permit us to move to Czechoslovakia, which is ready to accept us”. The Hungarian Government undertook to arrange for the transfer across its territory. Underlying this decision was Zachariadis’ directive to the Bulkes leadership about evacuation from Yugoslavia⁷³.

70. Ibid.

71. AJBT, I-3-b/279, Telegram from Bulkes Board to Tito, 29 VII 1949.

72. AJBT, I-3-b/279, br. 4477, Memo of the inhabitants of Bulkesa, 8 VIII 1949.

73. D. Kljatic, *Izguljena pobjeda generala Markosa*, pp. 188-200; D. Eudes, *The Kapetanis. Partisans and Civil War in Greece 1943-1949*, London, 1972, pp. 288-290.

Rankovic’s handwritten note on the document reads: “We will arrange everything for their departure from Yug.(oslavia)”⁷⁴. They did not have to wait long for their request to be fulfilled: at the end of August the first group of inhabitants (1200 persons) was transferred from Bulkes to the Hungarian border. During the first half of September the remaining members of the former Greek “red commune” moved to Czechoslovakia via Hungary in three subsequent transports⁷⁵.

The official explanation about the extinguishing of the Bulkes «commune» was provided in the editorial article in Belgrade *Borba* on 5 September 1949⁷⁶ it presented the “history” of the emergence of this community, with embarrassing details referring to the fraud by its leadership, discovered after the inspection of the state commission, testimonies of dissatisfied and harassed inhabitants who disagreed with the “line” pursued by Zachariadis and his followers. At Bulkes remained about 800 members of “Bulkes commune”. But dissolution of the “commune” (this) put an end to the “Bulkes case”.

74. S. f.n. 72, Memo...

75. MIP, PA, Grika, 1949, f-40, d-13, 415782, Aide-Memoire, Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Embassy of Czechoslovakia in Belgrade, 25 VIII 1949;D. Kljakic, 190. MIP, Pa, Gr~ka, 1949, f-40, d-13, 415782, Br. 1271/pov/49, 29. VIII 1949.

76. “Borba”, “Speculations and crimes...”