
WAR MEMORIAL'S DEMOLITION IN MACEDONIA OUTRAGES BULGARIA

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Balkan Insight

Bulgarian politicians and experts have reacted with indignation after a Macedonian journalist smashed a memorial to their wartime dead to smithereens.

Outraged Bulgarians have accused Macedonia's former prime minister of sponsoring the destruction of a mountain-top memorial to Bulgarian soldiers who there died in World War I.

We are witnessing a trend in which [Macedonia's former prime minister and leader of its ruling VMRO-DPMNE party] Nikola Gruevski is using provocations against Bulgaria to present himself as the sole defender of Macedonian identity, Andrey Kovachev, Bulgarian MEP and member of Bulgaria's ruling GERB party, told Focus radio on Monday.

He warned that this would not help Macedonian citizens in their faster integration into the EU and NATO, accusing Macedonia's politicians of inciting hatred against its neighbours.

Kovachev spoke following the destruction by a Macedonian journalist of a monument on the Macedonian peak of Kaymakchalan.

The memorial plaque was put up earlier in 2016 in honour of the thousands of Bulgarian soldiers who died there in a historic battle during the First World War.

The plaque was smashed to pieces with a hammer by a controversial Macedonian talk-show host, Milenko Nedelkovski, famous for his support of the country's embattled ruling VMRO-DPMNE party.

Milenkovski posted pictures and videos of himself destroying the monument on his Facebook page on September 22, Bulgaria's Independence Day, claiming it was put there by a group of Bulgarian criminals.

The plaque was put up few months earlier on the initiative of Bulgarian soldiers.

Asked by the Bulgarian government to disassociate itself from Nedelkovski's act, the Macedonian Foreign Ministry on Sunday published its official position in which it declared the erection of the monument an illegal act.

We expect our Bulgarian friends to respect the internationally recognized procedures for erecting memorials, it said.

Earlier on Saturday, Bulgaria's Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov, also demanded a reaction from the Macedonian authorities, warning that if they do not take measures against such acts, they will not receive any help [from Bulgaria] when they expect it the most.

Is this what the Bulgarians deserve for treating them like brothers ... Does this help our friendship, or the integration of Macedonia in the EU? Tomorrow we will have to vote for it, won't we?, Borissov said, hinting that Macedonia may lose Bulgaria's support for its admittedly already stalled EU accession bid.

Politicians, diplomats and other public figures joined in expressions of public outrage over the demolition of the monument.

Bozhidar Dimitrov, director of Bulgaria's National Museum of History, vowed that the institution would restore the war memorial, together with three others in Macedonia.

He told BIRN on Monday that he would seek support from the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry so that all official procedures are respected.

This is one of many provocations done with the protection of the [Macedonian] government, he said, calling the act inhumane.

Vladimir Yonchev, a Bulgarian journalist who visited the site after the memorial was destroyed, told BIRN that he hoped the incident does not lead to a spiral of hate between Bulgaria and Macedonia.

On both sides we are quite short-tempered. But this is not what people want. What Bulgarians, Macedonians, Serbians need to do is to show some respect for the deceased, he said.

The peak on the border between Greece and Macedonia was the site of a major battle in World War between Serbian and Bulgarian forces.

Serbia obtained the whole of the territory of the present-day Republic of Macedonia as a result of the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 - but Sofia claimed most of the territory should have gone to Bulgaria and occupied it after the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/vandalized-memorial-sparks-tensions-between-bulgaria-and-macedonia-09-26-2016>

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