



MACEDONIAN

DIPLOMATIC BULLETIN

GREAT BRITAIN'S MINISTER OF STATE SIR ALAN DUNCAN PAYS MACEDONIA A 2-DAY VISIT DURING HIS BALKAN TOUR

PAGE 5

IN FOCUS

WESTERN BALKANS MINISTERIAL MEETING IN SKOPJE



PAGE 3

DIPLOMATIC NEWS

PRESIDENT IVANOV MEETS EU NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY AND ENLARGEMENT COMMISSIONER HAHN

PAGE 2

H.E. MS. ORIETTA CAPONI: OUR RELATIONS ARE BASED ON PRINCIPLES OF SOVEREIGNTY, EQUALITY, SELF-DETERMINATION AND INDEPENDENCE

PAGE 10/11

MACEDONIA'S NATURAL WONDERS MARKO'S TOWERS ELEPHANT

PAGE 14/15

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PRESIDENT IVANOV HOSTS TRADITIONAL WORKING LUNCH WITH VISEGRAD GROUP AMBASSADORS

Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov hosted the traditional working lunch with the ambassadors of the Visegrad Group countries to the Republic of Macedonia on 13 February.

The meeting was attended by the Ambassador of the Czech Republic, Miroslav Rameš, the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland, Jacek Multanowski, the Ambassador of the Slovak Republic, Martin Bezák, and the Ambassador of Hungary, László István Dux.

Opinions were shared at the meeting on the possibilities to advance mutual cooperation, the ongoing political situation in the Republic of Macedonia, the process of EU

and NATO integration, the challenges that the European Union and Europe face and the positions of the Visegrad Group countries on the key challenges. President Ivanov hailed the Visegrad Group's continued support for maintaining the momentum of the EU enlargement process and its strong support for launching EU membership negotiations with the Republic of Macedonia as soon as possible. The ambassadors reaffirmed their commitment to continuing mutual cooperation in dealing with the migrant crisis and the security challenges of the Central and Eastern European countries.

PRESIDENT IVANOV MEETS EU NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY AND ENLARGEMENT COMMISSIONER HAHN

On 10 February, the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Gjorge Ivanov, received the Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn. Opinions were shared at the meeting on the ongoing political situation in the Republic of Macedonia and the possibilities to resolve the political crisis as soon as possible.

The need to form Macedonia's government as soon as possible was emphasized given that only with fully functional institutions can the country be prepared to handle all challenges.

"Overcoming the political crisis is vitally important for the Republic of Macedonia to

be able to fully dedicate itself to European reforms and to carry on accomplishing its European integration goals," President Ivanov said.

In the context of the ongoing situation, President Ivanov protested the absence of public condemnation for the meddling of certain neighboring countries in the home affairs of the Republic of Macedonia.

Commissioner Hahn told President Ivanov about his meetings with the leaders of the political parties and the views shared at them and stressed that the new Government should be committed to Macedonia's European integration and focused on the country's European future.



PRIME MINISTER DIMITRIEV MEETS EU NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY AND ENLARGEMENT COMMISSIONER HAHN

Emil Dimitriev, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia, received Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, on 9 February. The two officials underlined how important and necessary it was for the Republic of Macedonia to join the European Union and positively assessed mutual relations. They also shared their positions and views on the various aspects

of the current political situation. The reforms necessary to advance standards in all areas of life were accentuated and commitment was expressed to continued cooperation in the implementation of reforms. On the sidelines of the Ministerial Meeting, Commissioner Hahn also held separate meetings with the leaders of the parliamentary political parties.

SKOPJE HOSTS MINISTERIAL MEETING OF WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

Establishing an informal system to coordinate the group of six Balkan countries – the Republic of Macedonia, the Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Kosovo, the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro – with a 6-month rotating presidency and a 6-month joint agenda of concrete activities, and holding of as many meetings as possible to identify the common goals of integration into the European Union are only some of the conclusions of the meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of the Western Balkan countries that took place in Skopje on 9 February. In addition to the ministers of foreign affairs of the Region, the meeting hosted by Macedonia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikola Poposki, and the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Vladimir Peševski, was also attended by the Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, Italy's Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Vincenzo Amendola, and the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, Goran Svilanović. The ministers discussed the various forms of connection between the countries of the region, paying special attention to the priorities of the Italian presidency of this group, among which are fighting corruption and bettering the rule of law.

The ministers of energy also attended the meeting. The discussion regarding the concept of connection therefore focused on energy interconnectivity in the Region. Improving the legal framework in the energy sector and implementing as many projects as possible in this field was highlighted as something that had to be done to propel the industry forward. With a view to improving energy interconnectivity among countries, two agreements were signed between the European Commission and the international financial



institutions – the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the banking concern KfW – within the Regional Efficiency Programme for the Western Balkans (REEP Plus) and the Green for Growth Fund (GGF). With these agreements projects intended for the countries of the Region will be funded.

MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia, Nikola Poposki, attended the traditional 53rd Munich Security Conference on 17 February in Munich, the Federal Republic of Germany. The Conference tabled the changing global relations, focusing on the European neighborhood in particular. During the Conference, Poposki held a number of bilateral meetings with counterparts from NATO member states and partners including with Great Britain's Minister of State for Europe and the Americas, Alan Duncan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Italian Republic, Angelino Alfano, of the Republic of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, of the Slovak Republic, Miroslav Lajčák, and of the Republic of Estonia, Sven Mikser. Opinions on the current geopolitical context and the ways in which it can affect regional security and safety were shared at the meeting.



DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER POPOSKI MEETS WITH DELEGATION OF ATLANTIC COUNCIL FROM WASHINGTON DC

Nikola Poposki, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia, received a delegation of the Atlantic Council from Washington, DC on 1 February. The delegation was paying the countries of the region a visit to help develop a strategy for tackling shared challenges that hamper these countries' Euro-Atlantic integration and overall prosperity.

“The USA can be very useful in achieving regional stability. Macedonia aims to secure predictability and economic progress for its citizens. Its membership of NATO and the EU and developing good relations with neighbors will of course be of help in that process. While the former greatly depends on the US policies, too,



it is the countries of the region that have to take care of the latter,” Minister Poposki said.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER POPOSKI MEETS GREAT BRITAIN'S MINISTER OF STATE FOR EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS DUNCAN

On 23 February, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia, Nikola Poposki, met with the Minister of State for Europe and the Americas at Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Sir Alan Duncan, who paid Macedonia a 2-day visit during his Balkan tour. The reform processes, the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Republic of Macedonia and the political situation in the country were tabled at the meeting. The two ministers also discussed bilateral relations, Great Britain's recent vote to leave the EU and the British Government's next steps in this

regard. Poposki and Duncan laid stress on the NATO membership as Macedonia's strategic commitment. Thanking Minister Duncan for Great Britain's unwavering support for Macedonia's integration into international organizations, Minister Poposki underlined the commitment to continuing these partner relations between the two countries and the need to advance the relationship further.

The senior British official was also received by the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Gjorge Ivanov.



DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER POPOSKI MEETS MARRI REGIONAL CENTER DIRECTOR MUGOŠA

Nikola Poposki, Macedonia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, received the Director of the MARRI Regional Center in Skopje, Ambassador Tamara Mugoša, on 7 February. Ambassador Mugoša presented MARRI's priorities in the period ahead in the light of the risk of an increased number of migrants trying to reach Western Europe via the Balkan route.



DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER ISAJLOVSKI MEETS ALBANIAN COUNTERPART BARBULLUSHI

On 9 February, on the sidelines of the Ministerial Conference of the Western Balkan countries organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia, Deputy Foreign Minister Ilija Isajlovski met with his Albanian counterpart Odeta Barbullushi. Opinions were shared on that occasion on promoting bilateral relations and overall cooperation between the two countries and stress was laid on both countries' commitment

to intensifying communication and exchange of high-level visits. Isajlovski and Barbullushi welcomed their good regional cooperation and confirmed their interest in maintaining close cooperation in the future, too, and in extending mutual



support in the process of EU integration. The importance of Albania's support for Macedonia's NATO membership was also emphasized.

MEETING OF NATIONAL COORDINATORS OF EU CBRN RISK MITIGATION CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE

On 14 and 15 February in Skopje, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia hosted the 10th Regional Meeting of the national coordinators of the countries of Southeastern and Eastern Europe of the European Union Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative (EU CBRN CoE). Besides the national coordinators of the Republic of Macedonia,

the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, the meeting was also attended by representatives of the European Commission, the Regional Secretariat of the CBRN Centres of Excellence and the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). The ongoing activities in

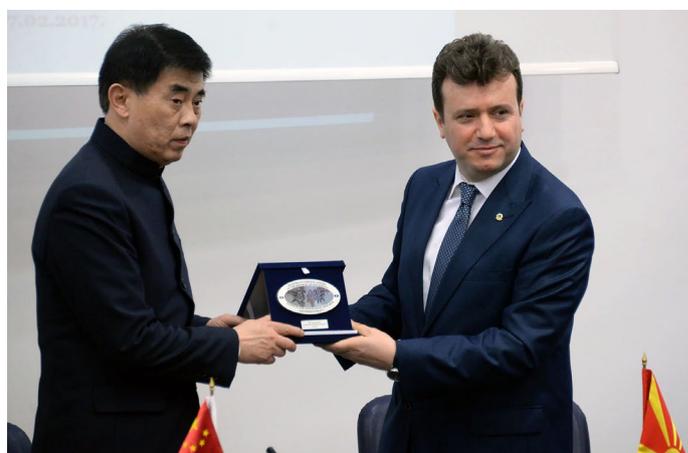


these countries on CBRN risk mitigation, the implementation of projects seeking to strengthen national capacities, the plans for future action and mutual cooperation and coordination were tabled at the meeting. The new regional CBRN waste management project was also defined at the meeting.

MFA IGRFP AND CHINA'S INSTITUTE OF EUROPEAN STUDIES SIGN MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The Institute for Geostrategic Research and Foreign Policy (IGRFP) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia and the Institute of European Studies of the People's Republic of China, part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Skopje on 27 February. The Memorandum defines the framework for future cooperation between the two institutions through joint projects and establishes the IGRFP as an equal member of the 16+1 Think Tank Network for better China-CEECs relations. During their working visit to the Republic

of Macedonia, the delegation of the Institute of European Studies, led by the Institute's Deputy Director General, Luo Jinghui, met with Macedonia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikola Poposki. After the meeting, a lecture was held on "The Relations and Progress of the 16+1 Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiatives of the Republic of Macedonia," as part of which Cheng Weidong, a representative of China's Institute, and IGRFP Director Abdulkadar Memedi also delivered remarks.



SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT HOLDS 13TH MEETING

The 13th Meeting of the Subcommittee on Transport, Environment, Energy and Regional Development in accordance with the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the European community and its member states was held in Skopje on 14 February. At the meeting chaired by Elena Kuzmanovska, the State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the latest progress achieved in aligning the national legislation with that of the EU and its implementation in the fields of transport, environment, energy and regional development was presented and discussed by representatives of Macedonian institutions and the European Commission.



PROMOTING POLISH CULTURE AND VALUES HAS BEEN A PRIVILEGE



The Honorary Consulate of Poland in Macedonia has been part of many projects considered as impactful and significant for the people of both countries

In the past several years I have had the privilege and the responsibility of bringing closer the people and the businesses from Poland and Macedonia, two countries I hold dear, two cultures I believe are worth celebrating and promoting everywhere.

As a business person and a family man I take the trust that I have been given very seriously and I continuously seek opportunities to stay true to my goal of supporting and promoting the initiatives which further unite the two countries whether by business, culture, sport or education. As a result the Honorary Consulate of Poland in Macedonia has been part of many projects considered as impactful and significant for the people of both countries.

Aiming to improve trade between Poland and Macedonia and to develop trade contacts and export-import opportunities, the Honorary Consulate participated in and supported the formation of the Macedonian-Polish Business Club at the Macedonian Chamber of Commerce. Personally I believe that the Business Club will further improve the business cooperation between the two countries and will serve export oriented companies as an access point in the Poland or Macedonian market.

In terms of promoting sport and its values, last year we were part of two projects. The first one aimed to strengthen social bonds

between Macedonian and Polish athletes. We organized a football tournament between FC Kołbuszowianka from Kołbuszowa, FC Karaorman from Struga and FC Ohrid from Ohrid. The tournament was accepted with great enthusiasm from all teams. The second project sponsored and helped organize the 14th International Regatta in Ohrid. In order to promote Polish sports, there were two Polish Kayak teams, the Victoria Kayak Club Sztum and the Kayak Club Czechowice.

One of the activities which both I and my team at the Honorary Consulate consider of great importance and as such will continue supporting in the future is promoting the Polish language and literature department at the Blaže Koneski Faculty of Philology in Skopje. For this purpose we have organized open days at the Faculty for all interested students and even more importantly we have granted full scholarships to a number of students having chosen to study the Polish language and literature at the Faculty. We believe that by granting scholarships we are not only promoting the Polish language but also supporting the education of students who just like all of us at the Consulate have come to love and appreciate the richness of Polish literature and culture.

The list of activities and projects completed by the Honorary Consulate every year is quite large, I really cannot go through

them all on this occasion, but it is important to mention some of the activities which seek to celebrate and share Polish tradition and culture in Macedonia. In this context we supported the 10th International Folklore Festival “Razigrano oro” in Ohrid, which promoted folklore, traditional costumes and dances not only among the Macedonian people but also among a number of tourists from around the world. Two cultural ensembles from Poland participated in the event promoting Polish folklore dance. Other successful events were the Poland Kitchen Days in the Pelister restaurant in Skopje and the Christmas gathering with young Polonia at the Nostalgija restaurant in Skopje. Both events celebrated the unique taste of Poland’s traditional dishes in a modern but authentic way, in a pleasant ambient and with the melody of Polish music. Both events attracted the attention of many guests.

One event that really stood out among all the activities we have had to promote Polish culture was the organization of the Polish Evening within the Ohrid Summer Festival. The event was all about the music of famous Polish musicians, conductor Jacek Rogala, Glass Duo and pianist Marian Sobula, and the gathering of the Polish diaspora and a number of guests from both the business and the diplomatic corps.

I am glad to be able to support and promote projects that connect the people and the businesses from Poland and Macedonia, introducing them to not only the historical heritage, but also to the future opportunities based on mutual understanding and cooperation.

One of the activities which both I and my team at the Honorary Consulate consider of great importance and as such will continue supporting in the future is promoting the Polish language and literature department at the Blaže Koneski Faculty of Philology in Skopje

AMBASSADOR AVIROVIK DISCUSSES CULTURE OF COEXISTENCE IN BAT YAM

On 25 February, Pajo Avirovik, Macedonia’s Ambassador to the State of Israel, took part in the public debate “Cultural Conversations” held in Bat Yam, a city south of Tel Aviv. In front of a large audience, Ambassador Avirovik talked about the culture of coexistence of the various ethnic and religious communities in Macedonia, particularly addressing the profound ties between the Macedonian and the Jewish peoples that have a positive effect on the traditionally close and friendly relations between the Republic of Macedonia and the State of Israel.

Dan Oryan, Director at Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador of the State of Israel to the Republic of Macedonia, spoke affirmatively about Macedonia in general, laying stress on its friendly relations with Israel, the



effort made to nurture the Jewish legacy and keep the memory of the Holocaust, as well as the ongoing cooperation projects.

H.E. Ms. Orietta Caponi, Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Republic of Macedonia

OUR RELATIONS ARE BASED ON PRINCIPLES OF SOVEREIGNTY, EQUALITY, SELF-DETERMINATION AND INDEPENDENCE



Your Excellency, since the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries in 2002, you are the first appointed Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Republic of Macedonia. How do you assess our cooperation in the past 15 years?

Indeed, diplomatic relations between our two countries were established in New York on 18 April 2002 with a view to impelling development and consolidating the relations of friendship and cooperation in the political, economic, commercial, social and cultural areas based on mutual interest. Both governments decided that relations would be based on the principles of sovereignty, equality, self-determination and independence between the States, as well as on the principles established in the Letter of the United Nations.

For me it is an honor to be the first Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Macedonia. It is for that reason that I have reiterated the commitment to making efforts to develop bilateral and multilateral bonds between the two peoples and governments within the framework of a climate of understanding and mutual respect.

The deepening of relations is as beneficial for Venezuela as it is for

Macedonia, contributing to the friendship that already exists between our peoples and governments. In this sense, at the moment we are working to activate agreements and to develop relations with Macedonia, to position the reality of the Bolivarian Revolution in this Eastern European country, through the diplomacy of respect, recognition and free determination of people. At the same time, we hope to present Macedonia in Venezuela so that both peoples recognize and find similarities in each other's cultures. This is human growth and education as a fundamental value of society.

What is your primary objective as Ambassador of your country to the Republic of Macedonia, and what is your assessment of the possibility for promoting bilateral cooperation in the future in areas of mutual interest?

At present we are working to define more closely some bilateral cooperation agreements, the agreement on cultural interchange in particular. The spirit of the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is to advance relations with all the countries that wish the same. It is for this reason that the diplomatic mission that I represent will be dedicated in 2017

to concluding bilateral agreements, not only in the cultural area, but also in the economic area, promotion and mutual protection of investments, avoidance of double taxation and fiscal prevention of evasion, visa liberalization and academic cooperation.

Every friendship requires solid foundations, especially in the field of economy. In this regard, what are the possibilities for closer economic cooperation?

Recently, I had the opportunity to participate in the 2017 Global Women Leaders Summit, organized by the Macedonian Chambers of Commerce from 17 to 19 February 2017. I am very grateful for the invitation to attend this event which was a very good occasion to present how we, Venezuelan women, have contributed to the development of Venezuela, and although today we undergo attacks of an economic war generated by imperial sectors that look to regain control of the natural wealth of our country, the Venezuelan woman is still regarded as the pillar of the family. I take this opportunity to explain why investors should come to Venezuela and what the opportunities are that my country offers. The Bolivarian Government has developed programs of productive development with the purpose of generating income different from the oil rent. At this moment interesting opportunities of investment and purchase of Venezuelan products exist. In this way doors have been opened to initiate commercial relations between Macedonia and Venezuela.

Venezuela is home to the world's highest waterfall, Angel Falls, and the second longest river in South America, the Orinoco. It also has the longest coastline on the Caribbean Sea. How many foreign tourists visit Venezuela annually?

As I mentioned earlier, the Venezuelan government has developed various

economic development programs in order not to depend on oil revenues. It is public knowledge that during the years 2015 and 2016 the price of oil fell by 70% and there is no doubt that the budget of the Venezuelan state has been affected. However, President Nicolás Maduro has maintained and increased funding of social policies, which is essential for the Bolivarian Revolution. In this way, the intention is to generate other sources of production of resources and what better opportunity than through tourism. As you have said, Venezuela is a magical land with unparalleled natural landscapes. In November 2016, the first public university dedicated to studies in tourism, the National Tourism University, was inaugurated and in this process the implementation of large infrastructure development projects will stimulate investment in this area. In April 2016, the Mérida - Mukumbarí Cable Car System was reopened. It is a luxury elevator that gives access to the most beautiful Venezuelan mountains and offers views of a unique landscape since it has six ecological units ranging from 1,577 meters to 4,765 meters above sea level, over a distance of 12.5 kilometers. It is rated as the most modern on the planet. This infrastructure has five stations: Barinitas (1,577 m.), La Montaña (2,436 m.), La Aguada (3,452 m.), Loma Redonda (4,045 m.) and Pico Espejo (4,765 m.), connected by four sections that have modern technology, making it also the safest and most reliable cable car in the world.

In 2016, approximately 1.2 million foreign tourists visited Venezuela and the number increases every year.

The people of Venezuela have a rich cultural history that has been shaped by American Indian, Spanish, African, Italian, Portuguese, Arab, German, and South American influences. One of Venezuela's most famous writers was Andrés Bello. Spanish is considered Venezuela's primary language that is spoken by the majority of the population, but there are over 40 languages spoken by the wide mix of Venezuelan people. Your Excellency, what are the most famous cultural events in your country?

The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela recognizes, besides Spanish, the languages of the indigenous communities, as they constitute the cultural heritage of the Nation and of humanity. In

Venezuela the mix of cultures is incredible. Indeed, Venezuela is a country with a high content of cultural syncretism that is shown in the Calendar of Traditional Festivals of Venezuela. Our indigenous roots coexist with the African and European mix, after the colonizing process. The expression of this mixture is evident in its demonym and in the traditional celebrations that are still observed throughout the country. It is not strange to enjoy a festivity in which the drumming of the African drum is linked to the indigenous dance in honor of nature, in front of an altar holding the Catholic Virgin.

The most important traditional festivities are:

- Carnival of El Callao, inscribed on the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO) in 2016. It is a cultural practice of the communities of this city of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which is related to the festivities of emancipation called "Cannes Brulées" that take place in the French speaking Antilles. From January to March, this traditional festivity groups up to 3,000 participants who parade through the streets of the town disguised as historical or imaginary characters to the rhythm of calypso and other music and dances. The parades are led by dancing women dressed in various dresses. These are the so-called madamas, Antillean matrons who are considered authentic pillars of the identity of El Callao because they are considered carriers and communicators of the cultural values of the community. Other characters of the carnival are: the medio-pintos, young people that entertain audiences by smudging charcoal on people who do not give a donation; the mineros (gold miners); and the diablos, masked characters who dance brandishing a whip to keep order.

- The Dancing Devils of Corpus Christi, inscribed on the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO) in 2012. The small communities along the central coast of Venezuela celebrate in a special way the Feast of Corpus Christi, a festival of the Roman Catholic Church commemorating the presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Groups of adult men, young boys and children, disguised as masked devils, perform steps of dance backwards, in an attitude of penance, as an official of the Catholic Church carries forth the Blessed

Sacrament. The musical accompaniment of the procession is performed with stringed instruments and percussions, while worshippers sound maracas to keep away evil spirits. At the climax of the celebration, the devils surrender to the Blessed Sacrament, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil. The dancers called "promeseros" are lifelong members of a confraternity that convey the historical memory and the ancestral traditions of the communities. Each confraternity crafts its own devil masks, which are worn with crosses, scapulars and blessed palm leaves. Dancers also use bells, handkerchiefs and strips of ribbon as protection from evil spirits. Women oversee the spiritual preparation of children, organize the stages of the ritual, prepare food, provide support for the dances, and raise altars along the procession route; in recent years, some communities have begun to welcome them as dancers. The practice is steeped in creativity, organization and faith, and promotes a strong sense of communal and cultural identity.

- The Parranda of San Pedro de Guaremas and Guatire, inscribed on the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO) in 2013. Every year, in the small towns of Guaremas and Guatire, devotees of San Pedro the Apostle celebrate the day of his feast. An image of San Pedro is stored in all the town's churches while the saint is celebrated with popular songs. Then, at midnight, a mass is held and the images are taken out and paraded through the streets. Central to the celebration is a re-enactment of the story of the slave María Ignacia, whose daughter was healed by the saint. "Parranderos" play key roles in the drama, wearing colorful, carefully prepared costumes representing the different characters, while other participants bear flags and banners, dance, play instruments, sing and improvise popular tunes. Women participate by preparing and training younger generations through workshops and by decorating the churches, dressing images of the saint and cooking traditional dishes. During the festival, the dancers, together with their families, neighbors and other community adults and children, gather to share moments of joy and togetherness.

DAYS OF IRANIAN CINEMATOGRAHY AT CINEMATHEQUE OF MACEDONIA

The event Days of Iranian Cinematography was held at the Cinematheque of Macedonia from 17 to 21 February. Organized by the Cinematheque of Macedonia in cooperation with Iranian cultural institutions and with logistical support from the Iranian Embassy in the Republic of Macedonia, the event consisted of four feature films and two documentaries. It opened with the showing of Seifollah Samadian's "76 Minutes and 15 Seconds with Abbas Kiarostami", a documentary posthumously dedicated to one of Iran's greatest directors. Kiarostami's last film "Take Me Home", a short documentary of 2016, which premiered at the Venice Film Festival, was also shown. The program also included "Fish & Cat" by Shahram Mokri, a recipient of numerous international awards including the special award of the Venice Film



Festival in 2013, Nima Javidi's "Melbourne", Abolhassan Davoodi's "Crazy Castle" and Reza Mirkarimi's "Today".

DAYS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE FILM

On the occasion of the Lantern Festival, which marks the end of the 2-week Chinese New Year celebrations, the Confucius Institute of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje organized the event Days of Chinese Film from 11 to 16 February. Five contemporary Chinese films were screened at the Cinematheque of Macedonia. The event opened with the screening of an episode of "A Bite of China", a documentary television series on the history of food, eating and cooking in China, and ended with the showing of Gavin Lin's feature film "A Moment of Love".



MACEDONIA DAY HELD AT KAZGUU UNIVERSITY IN ASTANA

At Kazguu University in Astana, on 17 February, the Embassy of the Republic of Macedonia in cooperation with the university and the students' organization, organized the event Macedonia Day. This was the first event of its kind organized by an Embassy in Astana and was very positively received by both those who hosted it and those who had a chance to be part of the activities taking place at three locations at the university. The event was opened in the main hall of the university by Renata Faizova, director of the international cooperation department, before about 200 students and professors. In

his address, Macedonian Ambassador Ilija Psaltirov thanked Kazguu University for the wonderful cooperation.

An exhibition of drawings of Macedonian national costumes and a presentation titled "Undiscovered Macedonia" were held as part of the event. Members of the university band and Ambassador Psaltirov then performed live two Macedonian and one Kazakh songs. In addition, several Macedonian dishes were presented prepared by students and the Macedonian book "The Name of Our Fatherland" by a group of authors was promoted at the university's library.

INTERNATIONAL CARNIVAL IN STRUMICA

Around 1,100 participants divided in 38 groups were part of the traditional International Carnival in Strumica on 25 February. This year, in addition to costumes from Strumica, Radoviš, Probištip, Delčevo and Kavadarci, there were also guests with costumes from Albania, Russia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia. A day earlier, a fancy dress party was held at which Aleksandar Tašev and his

wife Sonja were named prince and princess and they led the main carnival procession. Eventually the best costumes were declared and the 18th International Festival of Cartoons and Aphorisms was held. The carnival festivities ended on 1 March with an observance of the Trimeri customs and a concert by the ensemble Trimer.



INTERNATIONAL PROČKA CARNIVAL IN PRILEP

At Pročka 2017, the international carnival that took place in Prilep from 24 to 27 February for the 16th time, there were about a thousand participants. Within the framework of the carnival, the traditional exhibition was opened at which every year various costumes designed by primary and secondary education students are exhibited and the first academic conference titled “Customs and Festivals of Costumes in the Balkans: Tradition, State of Affairs and Tendencies” was held. The international procession as

a central event was held on 26 February. Numerous collective and individual costumes were displayed on that occasion. Aside from participants from Prilep and other cities in Macedonia, groups from the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Bulgaria also took part. As every year, this year, too, the carnival ended with a lunch at which the traditional Macedonian dish made of fresh beans was served.



MACEDONIA'S NATURAL WONDERS

MARKO'S TOWERS ELEPHANT

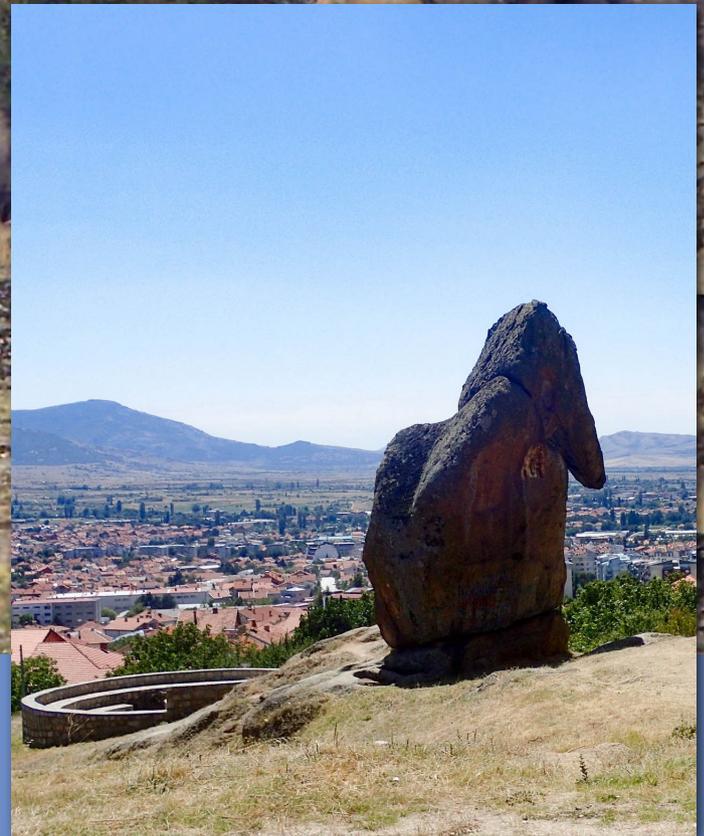


The stone figure in the shape of an elephant at the foot of Marko's Towers is one of the most attractive natural rarities of stone at the Marko's Towers complex protected by the state, which has also applied for UNESCO's protection. This rock which to some looks like an elephant and to others like a stork is a small natural wonder as it is referred to in Ripley's Believe it or Not! Encyclopedia of the Bizarre. The stone elephant is about 8 meters high and stands on a rocky pedestal at the foot of Marko's Towers from where Prilep can be clearly seen. The elephant is made of two naturally conjoined rocks. There are many legends about the stone elephant.

In the past, the residents of the ancient settlements of Varoš and Marko's Towers played an active part in the spiritual and material life connected to the elephant. Together with nearby graves dug in the rocks, the site was a cult place for a number of rituals. At the higher end of the rock there is a recess in which fragments of icons are still visible.

Those having committed evil acts used to come to the elephant to wash their hands and feet with the water that always filled its recesses and dents. The most widely spread was the legend that the elephant could cure barrenness. Infertile women circled the stone holding candles on the nights between Friday and Saturday imploring the supreme force to give them offspring. It is also

*The stone elephant
is about 8 meters
high and stands on
a rocky pedestal
at the foot of
Marko's Towers*



believed that the site was a Bogomil hangout since Bogomilism was quite popular in Varoš. A legend goes as far as to suggest that Hannibal brought his elephants to Prilep to pay tribute to the natural stone monument after his conquest of Rome.



WRITERS' ASSOCIATION OF MACEDONIA MARKS 70TH ANNIVERSARY

On 16 February, the Writers' Association of Macedonia marked its 70th anniversary at an event at which among other things awards were presented for best literary achievements in 2016. The Aco Šopov award for poetry was presented to Gordana Mihailova-Bošnjakoska, the Stale Popov award for prose to Liljana Pandeva, the Dimitar Mitrev award for criticism and essay writing to Kristina Nikolovska and the Vančo Nikoleski award for children's literature

to Aleksandar Popovski. The Writers' Association of Macedonia was founded on 13 February 1947 by Vasil Iljoski, Blaže Koneski, Risto Krle, Slavko Janevski, Vlado Maleski, Dimitar Mitrev, Ivan Točko and Aco Šopov. Blaže Koneski was the Association's first president. The Association has 540 members of various generations today. Its 70th anniversary will be celebrated with events organized throughout 2017.



EXHIBITION OF WORLD CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARD LAUREATES

At Osten Gallery on 9 February, an exhibition was opened dedicated to the laureates of the World Cultural Heritage Award, presented at the Osten Biennial of Drawing to deceased artists having made outstanding contribution to art globally. The exhibition will run

through 8 March this year. The award has so far been presented to Victor Vasarely in 2009, Pablo Picasso in 2010, Dimitar Avramovski Pandilov in 2012, Joan Miró in 2014 and Salvador Dalí in 2016.

