

## **Macedonia Needs Macedonians**

*By Victor Bivell*

Many of the problems that Macedonia faces are because it is a small country surrounded by bigger neighbors and because inside Macedonia the Macedonians are a declining percentage of the total population. Macedonia's neighbors: Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia and Kosovo are aggressive and demanding. Internally, Macedonia's largest minority, the Albanians, are also aggressive and demanding. In school we were taught that the best way to handle bullies is to stand up to them. I think a good way to stand up to these bullies is to have more Macedonians living in Macedonia.

Bullies respect strength more than they respect common sense or decency. More Macedonians will make Macedonia stronger, they will provide greater political stability inside Macedonia, and they will make it harder for Macedonia to be politically bullied.

Let's not understate the problem. Macedonia needs Macedonians to survive and to grow. The Republic of Macedonia is the only place in the world where Macedonians as a people can build a homeland. But that homeland is far from secure. It needs enough Macedonians to keep it safe and make it strong.

To do this, we need to reverse the traditional trend of Macedonians leaving Macedonia. Macedonia needs a new trend where more Macedonians move to Macedonia than leave it. If we can achieve this, over time Macedonia will become stronger and better able to handle its existential issues.

But it is a goal we need to be realistic about. Moving back is not for everyone. And there are some who think the idea is impractical. But I believe the majority of Macedonians know that it is a good idea. Among these expatriates, migrants and children of migrants are those for whom it may be a good solution or a good new direction in their personal, family or business life.

This is why I started the Macedonia Needs Macedonians campaign. It began in early 2017 with a meme on my pollitecon.com web site. The meme links to the Exploring Macedonia web site so people can see how beautiful Macedonia is and learn about traveling there for a holiday or to live.

I have also continued to write on the topic as part of trying to better understand the causes and possible solutions to Macedonia's existential, political and demographic problems.

Most recently I began the Macedonia Needs Macedonians group on Facebook. The group is about discussing these issues and informing and helping those Macedonians who want to move or return to Macedonia. Members can contribute information, ideas, suggestions, analyses and experiences on the topic.

I began the group in late December 2017 and in less than three months it has grown from zero to over 1,300 members. So there is interest in the idea and membership is growing

strongly. The members come from around the world with the biggest countries being Australia, Macedonia, Canada, United States, Greece and a good number of other European countries.

In that short time there have been well over 500 posts, over 1,700 comments, and nearly 7,000 likes and other reactions. So members are engaged and participating.

If you are on Facebook, please feel free to have a look and request to join the group.

A key contribution the group can make is to simply spread the idea that returning or moving to Macedonia is possible, that it can help to make a big difference to Macedonia, and that it can be a viable or good move for the right person or family.

Returning to Macedonia can also include Aegean Macedonia and other parts of geographic Macedonia. Many villages in these parts are in long term decline and some are in danger of becoming deserted. They need an injection of people, capital, and economic activity to revitalize them. Many Macedonians in the diaspora are in a good position to provide these. By visiting, investing or moving back they can help their villages and their families there to prosper.

I first wrote about Macedonia's population issues in 2002 soon after the Albanian terrorist insurgency. Over time I was disappointed to see that successive Macedonian governments failed to address these important issues and did not formulate or implement policies that offered a solution. Macedonia simply continued into further crises, the latest being the appeasement policies of the Zaev Government, in particular towards Greece and the name issue, towards Bulgaria and the Pirin Macedonians issue, and towards the Albanians in Macedonia and the two official languages issue.

Continual appeasement on fundamental national issues is not a long term solution for those who want Macedonians to have to homeland and all the benefits that brings.

The Macedonia Needs Macedonians campaign is a way for Macedonians around the world to take the fate of Macedonia into their own hands and to do what the Macedonian Government will not or cannot do. That is to make Macedonia a secure homeland for our long suffering people.

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