

# The Macedonian People Around the World are Like a Big Orchestra Without a Good Conductor

## Interview with Victor Bivell, journalist and publisher in Australia

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*Victor Bivell is an Australian of Macedonian origin. His name and work are well known among the Macedonian diaspora in Australia, as well as among Macedonian expatriates around the world. Bivell is a well-known journalist, publisher, editor and publicist. His website “Pollitecon” affirms the Macedonian national characteristics, and also the fight for human rights of the Macedonians in the Republic of Greece. Several projects are connected with his activities. Among them is the online reprinting of the first Macedonian newspaper*



*“Makedonska Iskra” that was printed in Australia from 1946 to 1957. In 2004, he published the work “Macedonian Communities Around the World”, which is the first compilation of a large number of names he could find for towns and villages around the world where there are Macedonian settlements. We talked with Bivell about the problems faced by the Macedonian diaspora, but also about how Macedonians from Australia see the political, economic, security and other challenges that affect Macedonia, how the Macedonian community thinks about ways to overcome the current challenges and what would their support be.*

**According to your objective and deeper observation from the outside, what is the key to the synchronization of the national interest?**

- Of course Macedonian politicians should unite on national issues. Greek politicians were united on what they saw as their national issues and it worked for them. Bulgarian politicians are united on what they see as their national issues and it is working for them too. The Macedonian diaspora does not understand why Macedonian politicians are not united on Macedonian national issues and that is another reason for their low opinion of them.

Macedonian politicians can unite in a progressive way that gives an example. Greek, Bulgarian and Albanian politicians unite on nationalistic issues that diminish and deny their minorities and neighbors. Macedonian politicians would gain great respect if they adopted policies that preserve Macedonia as the homeland of Macedonians, protect Macedonian minorities in neighboring countries, and at the same time continue to develop Macedonia as a model for multiculturalism. These things are not mutually exclusive. They are done in other countries. Please do it in Macedonia.

**Can the diaspora play a positive role and how?**

The diaspora is a huge resource for Macedonia. With her, Macedonia has everything it needs to be a successful and prosperous country. The Macedonian diaspora is huge. It has people, capital and talent. It also has a great love for Macedonia. And if the conditions are suitable, it will work hard for Macedonia. The diaspora can increase the population of Macedonia. It can invest, create jobs and grow the economy. It can produce art and science and sports. It can create opportunities for young Macedonians and keep them at home.

The Macedonian people around the world are like a big company without a good director, a big army without a good general, a big orchestra without a good conductor. The key thing that is missing is good leadership. Is there a politician in Macedonia who can unite Macedonia and the Macedonian people and create a country that can show leadership in the world and make us all proud?

### **What is your view on the parliamentary seats from the diaspora?**

The idea of having representatives and contributions from the diaspora is very good. But here, the question is how best to do this without turning the representatives into "yes-men" of the political parties.

The clear attitude of the diaspora in Australia is that the Macedonian political parties are not interested in the diaspora, its political views, its development, and are not interested in a meaningful dialogue. We know from experience that trying to contact politicians in Macedonia is very difficult, if not usually impossible. So there is very little trust and a lot of cynicism. That needs to change.

How best to do this? The politicians need to have a real interest in the diaspora and what it can do for Macedonia, not just what it can do for the parties and the politicians. We need more visits to the diaspora, more reactions and responses to emails and other contacts from the diaspora. At the parliamentary level, it would be good to have an office, a spokesperson or method where the diaspora can provide feedback and ideas to politicians, parties and parliament. While this may not be a voting position, it should at least have the power to speak before parliament on behalf of diaspora organizations and interested and concerned Macedonians. If politicians care about the diaspora, they will find a way that works.

### **What is your position on the functionality of the state institutions, as well as the diagnosed social deviations (eg systemic corruption) in Macedonia?**

This is a huge issue for the diaspora. When I suggest to Macedonian business people in the diaspora to invest in Macedonia, I almost always get the answer that the reason they don't invest is corruption in Macedonia.

Corruption, nepotism, bureaucracy and incompetence cost the Macedonian economy dearly. The diaspora can invest significantly and create jobs for Macedonians, but dealing with politicians and the system is too difficult. That needs to change. In Australia we have independent and serious anti-corruption commissions, which do excellent work and are strongly supported by the public.

## **How do you see the phenomena of Greater States from the neighboring states and peoples of Macedonia?**

- The politicians who lead and promote a Greater Albania are very low-level leaders; they are also very dangerous and are not in step with the progressive forces in the world. History has proven to normal people, but not to these Albanian politicians, that aggressive nationalism leads to a very dark place. If they don't see it, or if they don't care, they should be identified as potentially dangerous. They should be discredited and discouraged in every way, including by the voters, to leave the political system.

The future is not nationalism, but multiculturalism on the Australian and Canadian models. I encourage all politicians – regardless of whether they are Albanians, Greeks, Bulgarians or Macedonians, to adopt policies of multiculturalism.

In Macedonia, Albanian politicians have a real opportunity to adopt a leadership position that would impress the world. The "Christian" Greek and "Christian" Bulgarian policy of assimilation left a very bad impression on Macedonians and supporters of human rights. The policies of the Muslim Albanians in Albania were not as repressive.

Surrounded by a very shallow Christian Europe, Muslims and Albanians have a real opportunity to show moral leadership and greater humanity by working to create a future where all people are treated with respect. Unfortunately, it seems that the current Albanian politicians are too low level to take this opportunity.

A starting point would be for all minorities in Albania, Greece and Bulgaria to have the same rights as the minorities in Macedonia. Then we can all move forward together. That's what normal people want. They want peace, work, and opportunities for their children. Aggressive nationalism is useless and dangerous. From ancient times to today, Macedonia has been a multicultural country. Let's keep it that way.

## **What is your position on the inclusion of Bulgarians in the Constitution?**

- If the Bulgarians recognized the Macedonians from Bulgaria in the Bulgarian constitution, then I would have no problem recognizing the Bulgarians in the

Macedonian constitution. Any normal person can see that such reciprocity is right and just. But Bulgarian politicians are not right or fair. They are old fashioned nationalists and very dangerous people too. Until there is reciprocity, I would look to suspend parts of the Treaty of Friendship with Bulgaria, expel the Bulgarian and French ambassadors, and do everything possible to expose their foolish policies to the European people.

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