

The collaboration of Vlachs with Nazi-fascists (The Declaration of Autonomy of the Principality of Pindus)

Arben LLALLA

During the First World War in 1917, the Italian Army put forth the idea for the establishment of the Principality of Pindus based in Mecova in order to gain support in Greece¹. The head of that project was chosen the Prince Alcibiades Diamandi, a Samarina Vlach of Thessaly, a lawyer by profession. During WWI the project did not find broad support from the Pindus Vlach population. Prince Alcibiades Diamandi left Greece after the end of WWI and moved to Romania.

During World War II, the Greek Army, led usually by senior officers of Vlach origin, surrendered effortlessly to the German Army. On 20 April 1941, on Easter Sunday, the Vlach General of Greek Corp Army I Panagiotis Demestichas, the General of the Corp-Army II Georgios Bake, the Metropolitan of Ioannina Spyridon who was a Vlach from Pogonia, signed the surrender and cooperation of the Greek Epirus Army with the German Army². (The Metropolitan of Ioannina, Spyridon, was a bigoted anti-Albanian. He was the Minister of interior in the government of Northern Autonomy of Epirus in 1914. The Metropolitan of Ioannina, Spyridon, served as the Archbishop of Greece in 1949-1956. The people knew him by the name of Spyridon Vlachos, but his real surname was Sito).

After surrendering the Greek Army of Epirus and of Greek Macedonia, the Greek generals with Vlach origin gained privileges of ministerial-levels during the governments of 1941-1944. On 29 April 1941, the Chief of Staff of the German Army High Command Alfred Jodl and General Alberto Ferrero, Chief of Staff of the Italian Army in Albania, appointed Greek Prime Minister Georgios Tsolakoglou, who had a Vlach origin. After being assigned as Prime Minister, Georgios Tsolakoglou appointed General Panagiotis Demestichas, who was a Vlach, as Interior Minister and another top military officer, Theodore Saranti, a Vlach, as Mayor of Trikala. Colonel Theodoros Papadheothosiu, who was a Vlach, was elected as Mayor of Larissa-Volos. Vlachs already led Greece and that reality helped them to declare the independence of the Principality of Pindus.

In May 1941, Alcibiades Diamandi returned to Greece, went to Ioannina and conducted meetings with Vlachs there. In the summer of that year, Diamandi began a tour across the Vlach settlements, such as in Samarina, Grevena, Larisa, Trikala, Ellassona, and in many villages, conducting over 50 meetings in those areas with Vlach graduates in Italian and Romanian schools⁴. During those meetings with the Vlachs of Pindus, Diamandi opened the offices of the Autonomy of the Principality of Pindus in Mecova, Ioannina, Grevena, etc.

¹Citim, Stoica Lascu, *Revista Romana de Studii Eurasiatice*, Anul III, Nr. 1-2/2007, fq.91

²CRASH, Athinë, nëntor, 2011

⁴Αχλλέας Ανθεμίδης, *Οι Βλάχοι της Ελλάδας*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2002, fq.192

On 25 September 1941, Alcibiades Diamandi sent a memorandum to the the first collaborationist Prime Minister Georgios Tsolakoglou, as a representative of the Vlachs of Pindus and of the South Balkan Vlachs.⁵ The memorandum of Diamandi initially contained few requirements: a) The appointment of prefects, mayors and local leaders, would be done by him. b) The dismissal of permanent employees and the transfer of those who are not in favor of that movement. c) To compensate the injured individuals during the Italian-Greek war and Vlachs who had offered animals, fur and other items for the care of the soldiers. d) To punish those who during the Greek-Italian war had transferred rumanozondes with anti-national behavior⁶.

In autumn 1941, the Prince of Pindus Diamandi moved to Larissa and with the support of Italians who controlled that territory founded the Roman Legions Army. The commandant of those Vlach troops was appointed Nikolaos Matusi who was born in Samaria and lived in Larissa. The number of Vlachs who wore the uniform of the Roman Legions was about 2000⁷.

The Vlach military troops operated jointly with the Italian Army, which was commanded by the Italian General Romero, in places such as Trikala, Ellassona, Samarina, Grevena, Metsovo, Kalabak, Larissa, Farce, etc. They terrorized the population, robbed their food and possessions. The Vlach Roman Legions were attacked by the partisan troops of ELAS several times.

On 1 March 1942, the Vlachs intellectuals of Greece and representatives of the Vlachs in Albania, Bulgaria and Serbia, signed the Manifesto of the South Balkan Vlachs. At the top of the list of the signatories of that Manifesto of Vlachs was the chairman of the Vlachs of the Southern Balkans Alcibiades Diamandi, the chairman of the Vlachs of the Pindus Nikolaos Matusi, chairman of the Vlachs in Albania Vasili Varnduli, of Serbia Micelle Tegojani, of Bulgaria Ziko Area. The Vlach intellectuals of Greece who signed that Manifesto were: professor Dimo Cutra, doctor Kosta Taxon, lawyer Georgio Franko, professor A. Beka, Gaqi Papa, doctor Niko Micibuna, professor Dim Kaxhigogo, lawyer Kalometro, Colonel Vasilis Jorgos, professor Kosta Nikolesko, professor Jorgo Kondojadi, K. Kaloera, professor Virxhilio Balamace, professor Micele Barnd, engineer E. Goxhamani, engineer K. Stefa, engineer Niko A. Beka, professor Jorgo Balamate, engineer S. Peleqi, lawyer K. Pituli, lawyer, lawyer Dim Barnda, lawyer Toli Haxhi, John Kopano, professor Zisi Haxhibira, doctor Serxhio Triandafilis, Jani Mercos, Pericles Piteni, Jorgo Gjuleka, AkilleTaqi Furkoti, Athanasius Balodhimo⁸.

As it can be seen, the names who signed the manifesto of the Vlachs are intellectual figures of Greece, not ordinary people, workers, farmers, but well educated people who were well aware of what they signed. After the war, most of them were not severely punished or expelled from Greece as it happened with the Cham Moslem

⁵ΠΥΡΟΒΟΛΗΤΗΣ, Athinë, gusht-shtator, 2010

⁶Δημοσθενης Κουκουνας, *ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΚΑΤΟΧΗΣ*, Τομος Β, Athinë, 2013, fq.235

⁷Ευάγγελος Αβέρωφ, *Η πολιτική πλευρά του Κουτσοβλαχικού ζητήματος*, Tirakalla, 1987, fq.107

⁸Citim, Δημοσθενης Κουκουνας, *ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΚΑΤΟΧΗΣ*, Τομος Β, Athinë, 2013, fq.246

Albanian population, under the pretext that they were allegedly Germans' collaborationists. Today, their children or grandchildren are MPs, ministers, mayors, senior officials of the state institutions of Greece.

In late 1943, after it became obvious that the German axis power were losing the war, the leaders of the Vlach legions and the majority of its members abandoned their uniforms and joined the troops of Napoleon Zervas. The Prince of Pindus Alcibiades Diamandi left Greece and moved to Romania. Once the communists seized power there, he was arrested in 1948 and died a few months after his arrest in the basement of the Interior Ministry in Romania⁹.

The Prime Minister of the Principality of Pindus and the commander in chief of the armed forces of the Roman Legions, Nikolaos Matusi, fled Larisa after the capitulation of the fascist Italy in September 1943 and went to Athens where he collaborated with the German Army. He fled to Romania after the liberation of Greece in October 1944. There, the Romanian communist police imprisoned him as a collaborator of German Army. At the request of Greece in 1964, he was transferred back to continue his sentence. At the Court held in Athens in May 1964, the senior leader of EDES for Athens, Apostoli Papageorge, and the political leader, Apostol Paguco, were called to witness about Nikolaos Matusi. Only Papageorge gave evidence in thje court as witness.¹⁰

In Greece, Nikolaos Matusi enjoyed privileges up to the level of carrying a weapon with permission. In spite of the fact that he was a collaborator of the Italian and German Armies, the Greek courts never condemned him. His daughter, Ksenia Matusi was one of the most renowned painters in Greece and enjoyed privileges despite of her father being a collaborator of the Italian and German Armies during World War II. Nikolaos Matusi died in 1991 in Larissa¹¹.

The Vlach population of Pindus, although officially documented as collaborators of the Italian and German Armies, was not expelled from Greece. In the contrary, it took over the leadership of the country and participated directly in the massacres upon the Albanian population in Chameria. The Vlachs of Pindus, together with the orthodox refugees from Asia Minor, were the ones who plundered and exploited the properties of Chams.

The historian and journalist Dhimosthenis Kukunas, who has published several books and two volumes about the events in occupied Greece 1941-1944, brings the names of 83 Vlachs who signed the Manifesto of March 1942 and who were part of the Roman Legions; in fact, their number as aforementioned was larger. What sounds the bell is the fact that the children and grandchildren of the majority of the Vlach collaborators with the Italian and German Armies have enjoyed privileges. They have been or are MPs and historians who propagate against Albania for years. So, Vlachs were not persecuted

⁹www.romanalibera.ro/index.php/aldine/history/superspionul-care-a-devenit-principe-240174

¹⁰Σταύρος Παπαγιάννης, *Τα παιδιά της λύκαινας. Οι «επίγονοι» της 5ης Ρωμαϊκής Λεγεώνας κατά τη διάρκεια της Κατοχής (1941-1944)*, Αθηνά, 2004, fq.421

¹¹Po aty, fq.199

or expelled from Greece under the charge of being collaborationists of the Italian and German Armies. The untrue charge applied only to Cham Albanians was deliberately used to justify the expulsion of 25'000 Moslem Albanians (Chams) from Greece to Albania.

The research proved that the children or grandchildren of Vlachs who collaborated with the Italian and German Armies and who enjoyed privileges are the following:

Joan Nikolaos Mercos, born in Nimfeo of Florina. The residents of that village are Vlachs and some of them had come from Voskopoja. He was the signatory of the Manifesto of Autonomy of the Principality of Pindus. After the cooperation with the Italian Army in Larissa, in 1942, Joan moved to Thessaloniki with his family and began to collaborate with the German Army. After the war he was sentenced to 11 years to prison¹³. His son Nikolaos Joan Mercos was born in 1936 in Nimfeo of Florina. He now is a lawyer, writer and has published over 15 books. Nikolaos Mercos, the son of the Italian and German collaborationist, was the national adviser for Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis in 1990-1993. Nikolaos Mercos also assisted closely the former President and former Prime Minister of Greece Constantine Karamanlis. Nikolaos Mercos is an honored figure of the Greek state. Nikolaos Mercos belongs to the anti-Albanian group that promotes the annexation of southern Albania and is a friend of the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church of Albania, Anastasios.

The MP of Greece Konstantinos Gioulekas of the New Democracy party is a relative of Georgios Gioulekas, a Vlach from Samara. Georgios Gioulekas was a signatory of the Manifesto for the Autonomy of the Vlachs of Pindus in March 1942. He was member of the Vlach Roman Legions and a collaborationist with the Italian and German Armies in 1941-1944. The fate of Georgios Gioulekas is unknown, but the MP Konstantinos Gioulekas derives from the same family. The Vlach Konstantinos Gioulekas is a lawyer and has worked as a journalist for several years in the city of Thessaloniki. Since 2000, he is MP of the New Democracy Party in the Greek Parliament and has been assigned deputy-minister several times.

Within the Ottoman Empire, Vlachs had more rights than Albanians. They had primary and secondary schools in their native language, which is similar to Romanian. The struggle for the assimilation of Vlachs was competitive between Romanians and Greeks, and that caused Vlachs to have dual national consciousness and often fought each other fiercely. There were Vlachs of Grevena with a Romanian consciousness who assassinated the Greek Metropolitan Emiliaos in October 1911, because he propagated their assimilation.

More names of Vlach collaborationists

¹³Po aty, fq.255

As mentioned before, the historian and journalist Dhimosthenis Kukunas has revealed 83 Vlach names that signed the Manifesto for the Autonomy of the Vlachs in March 1942 and participated in the Vlach Roman Legions, aiding the Italian and German Armies. Some of them were not punished at all, others received 2-6 years in prison, and a marginal number of them sentenced to life imprisonment. The families of Vlachs who proclaimed the Autonomy of Pindus and who collaborated officially with the Italian and German Armies were neither persecuted nor expelled from Greece by Greek authorities after 1944. Their Greek citizenship was not revoked as it happened with Cham Albanians. Despite of the fact that the allegations about Cham Albanians collaboration with the invading Italian and German Armies were never proved, Cham Albanians were massacred and expelled permanently from their homes where they lived for thousands of years. The classic racist policy of Greeks is now documented in the books of Greek authors and affirms clearly the ethnic and religious divisions.

Alqiviadhis Konstandin Diamandi was born in Samarina in 1894 in a wealthy family. During the First World War, he had the rank of a non-commissioned officer in the Greek Army in 1917 and acted in the Vlach villages of Pindus. With Italian support he founded the Army of the Principality of Pindus and proclaimed himself a Prince. For those actions the Greek court convicted Diamandi, but he received forgiveness with the amnesty of 1927. In 1920-1925, Alcibiades Diamandi was a diplomat of Romania in Sarandon, keeping contact with Romanian and Italian secret services. In the early 1930s, he returned to Greece as a representative of some Romanian companies of oil and timber. During that period Alcibiades started the recruitment of Vlachs of Thessaly and Epirus in order to establish the Principality of Pindus with its own Army. With the arrival of the Italian and German Armies in 1941 Alqiviadhis Konstandin Diamandi established the Roman Legions of Vlachs, which were financed by the Italian Army. Prime Minister and commander of the Principality of Pindus became Nikolaos Matuci. In late 1942, Alcibiades Diamandi left Greece and moved to Romania. When the communists came to power in 1948, he was arrested and died after a few days in jail.

Nikolaos Mattheo Matusi was born in 1899 in Samarina of Pindus. After he finished university studies in Athens, he began working as a lawyer in Larissa. He was the signatory of the Manifesto of the Autonomy of Vlachs of Pindus in March 1942, and later the general commander of the Vlach forces known as the Roman Legions. After the capitulation of fascist Italy in 8 September 1943, he left Larissa and went to Athens, where he collaborated with the German Army. After the liberation of Greece in October 1944, he fled to Romania and after being captured by the Romanian communists was imprisoned as a collaborator of the Germans Army. At the request of Greece in 1964, he was transferred to continue his sentence in a Greek prison. At the court held in Athens in May 1964, the senior ex-leader of EDES for Athens, Apostoli Papageorgiu, and the political leader Apostol Paguco, were called to witness about Nikolaos Matusi. Only Apostoli Papageorgiu appeared at court to report as a witness against Nikolaos Matusi. In Greece, Nikolaos Matusi enjoyed privileges up to the level of carrying a weapon with permission. In spite of the fact that he was a collaborator of the Italian and German Armies, Greek courts never condemned him. His daughter Ksenia Matusi was one of the most renowned painters in Greece and has enjoyed privileges despite of the fact that her

father was a collaborator of the Italian and German Armies during World War II. Nikolaos Matusi died in 1991 in Larissa.

Dhimostheni Nikolaos Cutra, born in 1894, was a high school teacher in Larissa. During the Metaxas government he was dismissed on charges of making leftist propaganda to the students. Since 1941, he joined the idea of Diamandi about the Autonomy of Vlachs of Pindus. He was a signatory of the Manifesto of March 1941. He was the leader of the Vlach Roman Legions. After the war, he was sentenced in absentia to death. He died in 1961, hidden in the outskirts of Larissa.

Konstantin Taha was born in Larissa. He was a doctor by profession. He was the signatory of the Vlach Manifesto and in May 1941 he founded the first Roman Legion of Vlachs in Larissa. He was the main leader of the station of Roman Legions in Larissa. After the war he was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Vasileos Kristo Rapotika was born in 1888 in Gramos of Pindus. He was one of the first founders of the Roman Legions. He participated in several battles with the Italians against ELAS forces. He was killed in 1943 by ELAS.

Thomas Demetrius Pispirigos was a lawyer from Samarina. He was a fanatic of the propaganda of the Vlachs' Autonomy and an anti-Greek. During the movement, the Principality of Pindus aligned with the Italian Army and he was promoted to colonel. He was a member of the Roman Legions and was a chairman of the Association of Romanians in Thessaloniki. After 1944 he fled to Romania, where he died.

Nikolaos Miçibuna was a physician from Grevena and a signatory of the Manifesto. He became the main leader of the movement of the Vlach Autonomy in Grevena. After the capitulation of Italy in 1943, he settled in Thessaloniki. After the war he was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Georgio Miçibuna was born in Samarina. He was a member of the Roman Legions in Grevena. He cooperated with the Italian and German Armies. He participated in several battles against the communist Army ELAS. In 1944 he fled to Romania, where he was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Stefano Koço was a member of the movement for the Autonomy of Vlachs and first leader of the Roman Legions in Ellassona. In 1943, he became the Prefect of Larissa. He was a collaborationist with the Italian and German Armies. After the war he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Nikolaos Frango was born in Ellassona and was a signatory of the Manifesto and the leader of the Roman Legions in Ellassona. He collaborated with the Italian Army and after the war was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Zico Area was born in Grevena and lived in Samarina. He was an anti-Greek and a fanatic of the Vlach Autonomy since 1917. He was a teacher and principal at the Romanian gymnasium in Grevena and president of the Romanians in Grevena. In March 1941 he signed the Manifesto as a representative of Bulgarian Vlachs. After the

capitulation of Italy in 1943, he settled in Thessaloniki. After the war he was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Zico Sotiri Area was a teacher at the Romanian gymnasium in Grevena. He was a supporter of the Vlach Autonomy, a collaborationist of the Italian Army and an anti-Greek. After the war he was sentenced to 3 years in prison.

Georgios Vasilaqi was born in Grevena, a lawyer by profession, he was an anti-Greek and in favor of the movement of the Vlach Autonomy since 1917. In 1916 he was the mayor of Grevena. In March 1941, he signed the Manifesto of the Vlachs and was a collaborationist of the Italian Army. After the war he was sentenced to 3 years in prison.

Georgio Kazanas was a lawyer in Grevena and cousin of Alcibiades Diamandi. He collaborated with the Italian Army and made pro-Romanian propaganda. He led the Association of Romanians office in Grevena. After the war he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Pericles Demetrius Piteli was a businessman, first cousin and confident of Diamandi. He backed the Autonomy and the Manifesto of Vlachs of Pindus. After the war he was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

John Nikolaos Mercos was born in Nimfeo of Florina. He was the signatory of the Manifesto of the Autonomy of the Principality of Pindus. After the cooperation with the Italian Army in Larissa in 1942, he moved to Thessaloniki with his family and began to cooperate with the German Army. After the war he was sentenced to 11 years in prison. His son, Nikolaou Joan Mercos, born in 1936 in Nimfeo Florina, is a lawyer and writer. In 1990-1993, he was adviser to Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis on Greece's national issues. Mercos has worked closely with the former President and former Prime Minister of Greece, Konstantinos Karamanlis. Nikolaos Mercos is an honored figure of the Greek state and is a friend of the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church of Albania, Anastasios.

Vasileos Agorojanis from Samarina was the chairman of the movement of the Vlach Autonomy in Samarina.

Kristo Sterxios Anagnosti was a supporter of the Vlach Autonomy. He cooperated with the Italian and German Armies. After the war he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Vasileos Vardurli from Distrato was a signatory of the Manifesto of the Vlach Autonomy.

Nikolaos Efthimio Galani, from Distrato, took off the Greek Army uniform and put on the Italian Army uniform during the Italian-Greek war. He was a supporter of the Vlach Autonomy. He was sentenced to death in absentia.

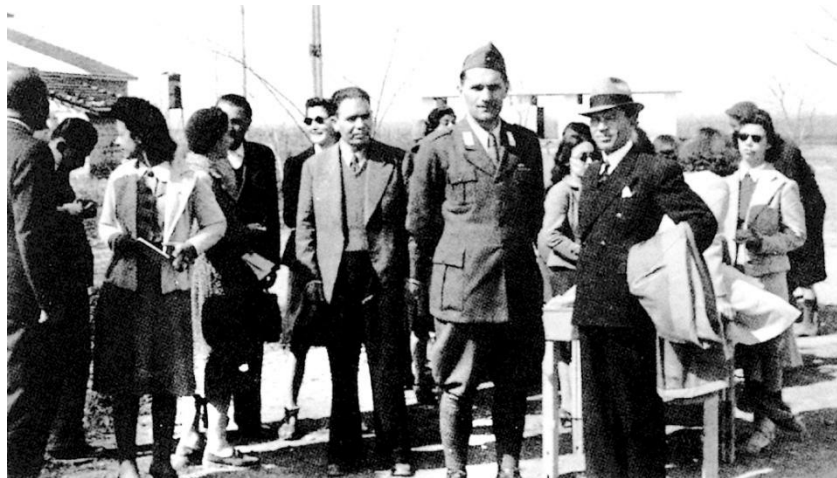
Georgio Giulekas was from Samarina and lived in Ellassona. He was a signatory of the Manifesto of the Vlach Autonomy and member of the Roman Legions. He is

recorded as missing. The current MP of the New Democracy, Konstantinos Gioulekas is a cousin of Georgio Gioulekas.

Other names are: E. Goxamani, Grigor Adham Guda, Stefan Dhelibasi, Demetrius Dimareli, lawyer Anastas Kalometros, doctor K. Kalometros, etc.



The Vlach Band which killed the Greek Metropolitan of Grevena, Emiliano Lazaridhis, when he propagated their assimilation in 1911.



The Italians with their Vlach collaborators in Larissa, 1942.



Nikolao Mattheo Matusi, Commanding General of the Vlach Roman Legions of the Pindus Autonomy.



John Mercos Nikolaos, a collaborator the Italian and German Armies, a Vlach from Nimfeo of Florina with Archbishop Anastasios.