

PRESS RELEASE

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Racial vilification hearing wraps up and judgement is reserved

The racial vilification hearing which began on Wednesday morning at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), and in which the Australian Macedonian Advisory Council (AMAC) was the complainant, came to a close yesterday.

Tribunal Member Noreen Megay said she imagined it would come as no surprise to both parties that she would reserve judgment (meaning she would retire to consider her decision). It is expected that her judgment will be handed down within the next several weeks.

Last year AMAC lodged the racial vilification complaint with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, alleging a contravention of the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* (Vic). AMAC's complaint concerned an article published in the 'Australian Macedonian Weekly' (AMW) in May 2009 entitled 'Who in this Celestial World Gave the Greeks the Right to Take Away the Macedonian Language?'

The Commission, given it does not have the power to determine a dispute and it considered our complaint contained sufficient merit, referred it to VCAT. At the hearing which took place at VCAT this week, AMAC was represented by barrister Tom Hurley, and our instructing solicitor was Peter Vlahos. The AMW was represented by former Victorian Director of Public Prosecutions, Jeremy Rapke QC.

Among other things, the article referred to Greeks as a "thieving nation", "freaks of nature", "deranged bastardly monsters", "evil" and the Greek language as "ugly". The article was written by American Slav-Macedonian Joseph Gandeto (formerly known as Jozif Grezlovski). The Tribunal was told by the AMW Editor, Ljubco Stankovski, that he was sent the article by Canadian Slav-Macedonian, Risto Stefov, and that he considered the article contained important information for the Slav-Macedonian community and decided to publish it the next day.

One of the more significant and surprising points of the hearing came during the cross-examination of the newspaper's editor. When asked whether he thought the article was capable of inciting hatred, serious contempt, revulsion or severe ridicule of Greeks, Mr. Stankovski resolutely answered "no". When AMAC's barrister Mr. Hurley asked him whether, "If the shoe was on the other foot" and terms such as "thieving nation" and "freaks of nature" were used to describe Slav-Macedonians, he would consider that this would have the effect of inciting hatred against Slav-Macedonians. To this question, Mr. Stankovski answered "yes". When it was put to him again and he was asked this would have the effect of inciting serious contempt against Slav-Macedonians, Mr. Stankovski again answered "yes". However, later

when it was again put to him that the article had this effect in relation to Greeks he again, steadfastly, answered “no”.

Later in the hearing, Mr. Rapke asserted that Mr. Stankovski’s self-incriminating answers were due to language difficulties. This is despite the fact that the respondent relied on his evidence for other purposes and Mr. Stankovski is the editor of a newspaper and has responsibility to approve articles written in English for publishing.

These answers constituted a stunning admission by Mr. Stankovski and a shocking illustration of the blatant hypocrisy of his newspaper and Slav-Macedonian nationalists in Australia. Those sitting in the hearing room were visibly stunned by these admissions and there was a sharp increase in movement and whispering on the respondent’s side of the room.

AMAC hopes that the Tribunal will find the AMW acted unlawfully in publishing the article. However, at the very least, AMAC is pleased that its grievance has finally been publicly aired and that the AMW will likely be deterred from publishing similar vilifying, abusive and racist articles.

The article in question is attached to this press release.

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Who in this celestial world gave the Greeks the right to take away the Macedonian language

Gandeto

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Australian 'Macedonian' Weekly

"When the Great War comes, Macedonia will become Greek or Bulgarian, according to who wins. If it is taken by the Bulgarians, they will take the population Slavs. If we take it, we will make all of them Greeks"

This is the statement uttered by the Greek Prime Minister Harilaos Trikoupis who led Greece from 1882 to 1895. This is the Greek plan to "liberate Macedonia" from itself and make it Greek. This is how modern Greeks made the transplanted Asian Christians—who took over the homes of the dispersed—or rather forcibly thrown out ethnic Macedonians—into "lawful" inheritors of the ancient Macedonians. This is how the newly created "Greek Macedonians" were actually manufactured.

Just the mere fact that Harilaos Tricoupis states that "if we take Macedonia we will make all of them Greeks" is a glaring admission that:

- (a) Greeks did not possess Macedonia,*
- (b) Macedonia was never Greek before the "Great War" of 1913,*
- (c) Greeks cry that Macedonia was "always Greek" is a blatant lie and a recent invention,*
- (d) it is an admission that there were no "Greek Macedonians" in Macedonia and*
- (e) all of the Greek hoopla about the name "Macedonia" being Greek is a grotesque manipulation of facts by a thieving nation.*

"If we take it, we will make all of them Greeks".

This is not a statement of a "bar-stool patriot"—or should I say a fascist-ideology-trained individual—to safeguard the Hellenic nation. This is not a statement mumbled by a fiery Stohos´ supporter drunk with euphoric glory of being proclaimed the inheritor of the ancient Greeks and appointed a guardian of Hellenism, nor is it a statement made by an irrational war monger. This is a calculated statement, indeed, made by a thoughtful, competent leader of a nation and that is why its weight, its meaning and its clarity of purpose is so overbearing and concise that no amount of infused dilution can diminish its historical significance. These are the words, the intent and the vision, if you will, of the Greek Prime Minister who, arguably, uses a well-scripted plan of action in pursuit of the "Megali Idea" to permanently change the ethnic landscape of Macedonia.

What he so placidly states and coolly envisions, is to be accomplished through the most brutal

and inhumane methods ever invented and used against other human beings that simply boggles the mind: taking the Macedonian language from the Macedonian people.

The gravity of this crime is of unimaginable proportions. Nothing, in the annals of history, comes even close. Please, stop for a second and imagine what it entails; stop for a second and picture children mute at play; mothers suffocated in fear with unexpressed emotions, and deafening bewilderment of the speechless grandparents. Picture, if you will a bird without a song; a flower with neither color nor scent; or a sunrise without the morning hue.

Does it make any sense?

Harilaos' prophecy came true and in the Great War of 1912-13, Greeks—with the support of the western nations who reeked with chauvinism and hypocrisy—took Macedonia for the first time in their history. Ever since then, this thieving nation meticulously engaged its fascist army in destroying anything Macedonian and replacing it with Greek. To put a permanent imprint on a land they never owned before, they uprooted the ethnic Macedonians from their ancestral lands; burned and defaced any Macedonian artifact found connected to the past, transplanted refugees from Asia Minor and spread their gruesome poisonous propaganda throughout the Macedonian land. By erasing the Macedonian legacy, these fascist Greeks felt that they can eliminate and wipe out all potential witnesses from ever challenging the newly established status-quo.

While with time, I think, we can forgive their zealousness for replacing the Macedonian toponyms. We can also overlook their crime in ethnically cleansing the Macedonian people from their homes. We can ignore the fact that they burned our old books written in the old Macedonian language. We can, perhaps, disregard the atrocities committed during the war; we'll even discount the murders perpetrated in the name of Hellenism; we can forgive the delusional Greek zealots from erasing the Macedonian written language from the Macedonian churches and monasteries. Furthermore, we can close our eyes to the everyday torments inflicted on those ethnic Macedonians who elected to stay in their ancestral homes and take a chance under the hated Greek occupation.

I think we can, somehow, manage to convince ourselves to let everything stay in the past.

But what we cannot overlook, what we cannot ignore, what we cannot disregard, cannot forgive, cannot close our eyes to, and we cannot ever remain silent about is the fact that these Greek zealots, these Greek deranged bastardly monsters took the Macedonian language away from our Macedonian children. That is what we'll never, in a million years, be able to overcome and put behind us. That we cannot do.

How can a stinking Greek teacher and a spy-for-a-priest religious person denigrate, disparage, malign and ridicule the language of a child spoken by his mother and grandmother. How can a first grader be made to feel inferior because he does not speak Greek? How can a butcher-for-a-priest refuse to baptize a child with a name given by his parents? How can a priest, a religious person—who claims to propagate the word of God—spy on his parishioners and impose Greek names on the Macedonian children?

Who gave the right to these freaks of nature to impose their ugly language on other populations? Who bestowed them with such powers? How is it conceivable to even think of forbidding people from using the only language they ever knew; a language that is a

connection and remnant that has been used for hundreds of generations? How can these deranged monsters, forbid the language a child learns from his mother; the very first words it hears from the mother's lips.

What evil alien abstraction possessed your dark soul to deprive a child from learning its mother's songs? What barbaric wickedness obliterated your senses to deprive the children from learning their traditional cherished bed-time stories and songs, saved and propagated for generations on hand? Just what morbid urge, what dark indomitable fear prompted you to act with such horrid ferocity against defenseless population entrusted under your care?

Who gave you that right? By what celestial standards did you assume that it would be acceptable to forbid the language the people used? What evil spirits possessed your moronic conscience to be so cruel and predisposed to such ghastly monstrosity?

(I wonder who, in this hollow Europe pretended that they did not know what was happening in Greece. And, if they did not know then, don't they know it now?)

They preach to Cuba about human rights issues and yet conveniently "forget" to look in their own backyard; Greece makes a mockery of their professed democracy).

However, I salute all the progressive Greeks, who today—at their own peril—bravely support the ethnic minorities in Greece. I salute their courage to stand up to the hot-headed, brain-washed nationalists who—drunk with imbued patriotism—blindly follow the governmental line and I, certainly, and with added revulsion, pity those who seed and propagate hate, foment intolerance and practice deceitful fanaticism.

These ultra nationalists—who still dwell and operate in the middle-ages—and unfortunately, dominate the Greek government today, have the audacity to claim that there are no ethnic Macedonians living in Greece.

Instead of denying the ethnic Macedonians their rightful place in your society, you should apologize to them and embrace them as your own. Instead of hiding behind some convoluted interpretations of nebulously worded paragraphs found in some forgotten treaties, you should welcome them in your fold as equals.

Eliminate your xenophobic tendencies and do away with your outdated sclerotic thinking. Furthermore, show foresight and courage and strike down all the discriminatory practices as null and void. And, finally, instead of looking at your own minority group as potential danger to your Hellenic identity, give them a chance to fully integrate themselves in your professed democracy.

Learn from your neighbors' mistakes. I will repeat this one again: learn from past experiences that so tragically plagued your immediate Balkan neighbors.

As of now, Greece is alarmingly deficient in human rights, one of the poorest countries in the European Union and a nation in a downward spiral wrought with internal domestic strife. Instead of blocking Macedonia's path to European and world integration, Greece should play more constructive role in the Balkans and look courageously towards the future. The Republic of Macedonia could be your forgotten asset; use your chance wisely.