



Society of «Serraion Politeia»

10 Merarhias str

Serres

Tel: +30 6944186625

+30 6944574306

Email: naniopou@civil.auth.gr

Your excellency Mr Plevneliev, president of the Republic of Bulgaria

I was born in a village called Neos Skopos, which is located near the city of Serres. During the Second World War, our area suffered many hostilities due to the Bulgarian annexation. I will focus on just one of those sufferings in this letter.

My family's home in the village was among four other houses of where our neighbours have mourned for decades because five of the eighteen young men killed on the school wall by the occupation forces in 1943 were their dear sons. This memory has been nearly unbearable for 71 years!

Yet, five decades after this atrocity in the early 1990s, our village witnessed the turning of the page of history and our former oppressors from Bulgaria were the ones in grave need. Instead of rejoicing in your sorrow, the people of Neos Skopos learned of your pain through mass media outlets, heard the terrible news and saw the pictures of your citizens and their children starving in Bulgaria. They realized the approaching winter would be deadly for many of them.

Apart from the organized Greek State, the people from the areas of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace spontaneously, and without ulterior motives, rushed to help the Bulgarian people through any means possible. We did it because of our cultural values as a civilized community, and because our common Christian Orthodox religion demands we reach out to those in need.

I can attest to these facts personally, as I found myself with many other people from our village carrying humanitarian assistance into an orphans' house in Blagoevgrad. From Blagoevgrad, inhabitants also visited our village several times and around 50 children were offered hospitality in the homes of families in the village. They returned home to Bulgaria loaded down with presents and supplies.

Among the families that hosted these children were some of the very ones that had been mourning the murder of their young men 50 years earlier. Their brothers and sisters were still alive, still remembered the great loss their families suffered, and yet, they still showed hospitality to Bulgaria's starving children. This gesture was an unparalleled demonstration of the unselfishness and magnitude of our souls; the people of Neos Skopos extended true forgiveness and a willingness to forget the past and step forward toward a better future.

What greater proof is needed from our side, from the side of all the people of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace? We seek to live in peace and practice mercy. What more is there to do to demonstrate our best wishes for the people of Bulgaria?

We call on the people of Bulgaria to reconsider the aggression and pillaging of the past and respond to our loving and peaceful gestures. This could be accomplished through the return on the looted relics from the Holy Monasteries of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

It cannot be denied that looting of these treasures took place. The people of our area know about the looting of the relics by the Bulgarian Army, particularly those near Neos Skopos from the Holy Monastery of Timios Prodromos of Serres, which is a beloved place of worship for our families and communities in the surrounding region. Complicating this issue is the fact that the people also know that Bulgaria has signed war treaties and has not lived up to their promises entirely, especially concerning the return of the relics.

I have always felt the return of relics would have been a gesture of goodwill from the grateful Bulgarian people we helped prevent from starving during the 1990s. But it did not happen. During Bulgaria's accession to the European Communities in this century, I anticipated the return of the relics and the fulfilment of the treaties would be imperative, but, again, we have been ignored and left grieving our great losses.

I believe your predecessor in the Presidency of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Parvanov, was close to resolving the issue, which is detrimental to complete restoration of our relationship. It is a thorny issue for the local communities of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, if not for the central government. I have read Mr Parvanov was prevented from honoring the past treaties by the populist nationalists and "intellectuals" who advocated for the ex-communist propaganda attitude.

Perhaps, in this decade we can take the first step toward justice. I am informed that experts from both countries are negotiating for an exchange of the bones of Tsar Samouil with "part of the relics". This issue is loaded with serious cultural consequences. If it appears that Bulgaria will return only a portion of the stolen relics from the Holy Monasteries following these negotiations, a growing bitterness in the hearts of the people of northern Greece will be the result.

Therefore, return all of the relics stolen from Monasteries to the Monasteries and ask the Greek government, as a gesture of goodwill to send to Bulgaria the bones of King Samouil, which have been found in Greece. I believe this proposal will be met with a favorable response. Such a sincere gesture will erase the shadows of mistrust which exist in our relationship, and will help unify our people and countries in the face of the unstable environment we are all facing.

Prof. Aristotelis Naniopoulos
President of the Society of Serraiion Politeia