THE ETHNIC GREEK MINORITY NEWSPAPERS IN ALBANIA DURING WORLD WAR II (1939-1945)

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ABSTRACT

By means of the present article we aim to highlight the newspapers of the Ethnic Greek Minority published during World War II (1939-1945) in the territory of Albania and Greece. We will pay more attention to the literary sections of the newspaper «Ο Αγώνας μας» [“Our war” (1944)] where were published the works of the artistic literature of the Ethnic Greek Minority writers in Albania. We will study especially the poetry and the stories published in the newspaper, bringing concrete titles and general characteristics of these literary types, which had special artistic and aesthetic values.

The Newspapers of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania enriched the literary tradition and the culture of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania and as such deserve to have their place in the studies of the journalism and literary criticism.

KEYWORDS: *The Newspapers of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania during World War II, Literary sections of the Newspaper “Our War” (1944), “Wall Newspapers”*

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INTRODUCTION: THE PRESS OF THE ETHNIC GREEK MINORITY PUBLISHED IN THE TERRITORY OF ALBANIA IN 1944

Tracking the events through the press had been transformed into a common issue for the inhabitants of the Ethnic Greek Minority who lived in the south of Albania. In many villages, there existed a few Greek newspapers before the war, like: «Βήμα» (“The tribune”), «Ακρόπολις» (“Acropolis”), «Πρωία» (“The morning”), «Καθημερινή» (“Daily”) etc.¹

After the occupation of Albania by Italy (1939), the Greek press stopped circulating in the territory of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania, and during the World War II (1939-1945) the need for information was noticeable. The news bulletins, the communications, the announcements published by the resistance organizations in Greece, especially «ΕΑΜ» (“National Liberation Front”) - «ΕΛΑΣ» (“Greek Liberation Army”), circulated manually in all the villages of the Ethnic Greek Minority. In these conditions, arose the need to activate the entire population of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania to fight the invaders. In addition to the Nazism -Fascism resistance, were made great efforts to publish some newspapers, which were successful only in 1944 when the following newspapers were published:

¹ Menelau Dhaljani, “59 years “«Λαϊκό Βήμα»/“Llaiko Vima”, An unquenchable light of the Greek soul”, newspaper “Llaiko Vima”, Thursday, 1 July 2004, p. 1.

- The typed newspaper **«Ο Αγώνας μας»** ["Our war" (12 April – October 1944), the Anti-Fascist youth organisation of Dropulli i Sipërm, which first circulated on April 12, 1944, and stopped publishing in October 1944.
- The newspaper **«Η Φωνή του Αντάρτη»** ("The voice of the rebel"), edition of army division «Θανάσης Ζήκος» ("Thanas Ziko").
- **"The wall newspapers"**, most of them circulated in the villages, for example: the one of the Poliçan and Pogon villages entitled **«Αναγέννηση»** ("The Renaissance"), published in 11 pages with the subtitle: "Poliçan village publicist edition" and was lunched every Sunday.

These newspapers contributed to the creation of political, Anti-Fascist and social awareness of the citizens. Many of their publishers later became newspaper contributors and correspondents **«Λαϊκό Βήμα»** ["Llaiko Vima" (1945-2017)] which has been one of the longest-lived and most important newspapers of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania.

THE NEWSPAPERS AND THE MAGAZINES OF THE ETHNIC GREEK MINORITY IN ALBANIA PUBLISHED IN THE GREEK TERRITORY DURING 1939-1944

- **«Πελασγός Κορυτσάς»** ("The Pelasgian of Korça"), a patriotic newspaper, edition of the Epirotes. The founder and the owner K. Skenderi, Athens, 2nd period 1918 – 1924, 3rd period 1925 – 1941.
- **«Πελασγός Κορυτσάς»** 1918 – 1941. [Reprint (in Athens) of the newspaper **«Πελασγός»** ("The Pelasgian")].
- **«Εγκυκλοπαιδικόν ημερολόγιον «Πελασγού»** ("The encyclopedic calendar of "The Pelasgian"). K. H. Skenderi, Athens 1931-1941 and 1947. Besides the topics regarding the Ethnic Greek Minority there were also included other topics not referring to it. During 1939-1941 and 1947 continued to be published under the title **«Ημερολόγιον – Λεύκωμα (Πελασγού)»** ("The calendar – Album/Diary (The Pelasgian)"), K. H. Skenderi.
- **«Η Φωνή της Βορείου Ηπείρου»** (The voice of the Ethnic Greek Minority), an edition of the local national organization of the Ethnic Greek Minorities of the National Liberation Front (E.A.M.), Athens 1944. The Communists had published only one edition.
- **«Βόρειος Ήπειρος»** ("The Ethnic Greek Minority"), weekly edition. The responsible: I. Dhjamandi from Dervişani village, Har. Varfi, Ioannina 1944 – 1960. First edition 18 – 12 –1944. Totally: 350 editions. Last edition in late January 1960.

THE NEWSPAPER «Ο ΑΓΩΝΑΣ ΜΑΣ» ("OUR WAR")

The fifteen-day newspaper **«Ο Αγώνας μας»** ("Our War") was published in Dropulli i Sipërm by the journalist Menelaos Dalanis (1921-2000), who was from the village of Bularat in Gjirokastra District. In 1943 he took part in the Resistance of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania against the invaders. The newspaper was typed by the young Dhimitër Kito. It circulated with only 8 – 9 editions from April to October 1944.

The journalist Vangjel Bozdo in an article in the newspaper **«Ρωμιосύνη»** ("Romiosini", (1997-2006)) wrote:

"...Today (12 April 1944) the local anti-fascist youth council sent us an important gift, a new weapon, which is a newspaper that will enlighten the path of the great war we are making to escape the invader and gain our freedom!! It is written on its pages:

"Death to the fascism, freedom to the people!"

Ο ΑΓΩΝΑΣ ΜΑΣ ("Our War")

Edition of the Anti-Fascist Youth of Dropulli i Sipërm

First year, edition no.1

Following the article of the journalist Vangjel Bozdo, distinguishes the main article with the title: "A step ahead"² was written:

"...It's been a long time the press was needed in our community. The section council of the anti-fascist youth, with the help of the national liberation council, took today the joyful decision to publish the first edition. The section council will try to publish regularly this edition every week or every ten days. For the first time in the minority is published a newspaper where the youth will express their views."

The editorial wrote about the close cooperation and brotherhood that created the anti-fascist war between the Greek minority and the Albanian people about the struggle to develop the Greek people and the other people for the disappearance of the fascist plague and the better days to come after the victory.

The readers of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania had already read the news bulletin published about the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War, but the newspaper "Our War" was something else for them, more advanced. It represented a real newspaper and it caused special enthusiasm. The newspaper was an ordinary typed edition, but in many pages which contained the articles, the correspondence, the news, the slogans, and in the following editions it also published portraits of martyrs and poetry.

In its first edition, April 12th, 1944, the newspaper included also the articles and the correspondence about the work of the youth in the background, about its organizational issues, etc. Everything was read with curiosity and enthusiasm, and penetrated into the soul of the Ethnic Greek Minority. Even the other subsequent issues influenced the anti-fascist education of the youth that marked their soul.

In the second edition of the newspaper "Our War" was published the article "The freedom dawns", by the journalist Vangjel Vozdho, where were esteemed the victories achieved by the partisans in the battles against the Nazi-fascist occupiers where the youth were called for reinforcement and to give its contribution to the war.

*"...the two Minority battalions become three. The task of our youth is to grab the weapons, and reinforce the partisan army."*³,

And in a pretty visible place was written the slogan: "The freedom is not donated, it is won."

² Vangjeli Vozdho, «Ο Αγώνας μας»/"Our war" Greek war newspaper for the youth of Upper Dropulli", newspaper «Ρωμιός»/"Romiosini", Thursday, 27 April 2000, p. 2.

³ The article "The freedom dawns", newspaper «Ο Αγώνας μας»/"Our War", 12 April 1944, p. 2.

The newspaper “Our War” by that time and following used to pass on every person and every house, and used to spread between the young and the old people the joy and the optimism for victory.

This typed newspaper was not ‘planted in a barren land’. During the first years of the war, dozens of youth organizations in the territory of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania used to write by hand wall and pocket newspapers in which they spoke out against fascist invaders and at the same time tried to cultivate the Greek culture and language.

The youth and the people of the Ethnic Greek Minority in order to escape the fascist invaders took part in countless battles in the Muzinë, Pecë, Llongo, Delvinë, Kakavi and Konispol areas. The years of the National Liberation War for the Ethnic Greek Minority were years of battles and heroism. Many fighters, who fought alongside with the Albanian partisans, also became heroes. During the period of the National Liberation War, the Ethnic Greek Minority was side by side with the Albanian people and by means of its blood, along with the freedom, brought new chapters and the flourishing of its creative activity.

THE LITERARY SECTIONS OF THE NEWSPAPER “Ο ΑΓΩΝΑΣ ΜΑΣ” (“OUR WAR”) 1944

The poetry and the prose inspired by the ideals of the freedom, the ideas of the Communist Party of Albania, the partisan heroism, etc. were also published in the pages of the newspaper “Our War”. These simple creations reflected the dimensions and the greatness of the anti-fascist resistance, the freedom-loving and progressive desire of the population, their hopes for democracy and a new society, their hate of the occupiers and their resistance to them. The enemy, in addition to the partisan war, was also shaken by the explosion of the muse, the partisan songs that echoed throughout the Ethnic Greek Minority and became the main expression of the creativity in this period.

The literary works of the National Liberation War had a heroic character. The poets were inspired by concrete facts. The warrior shot the enemy by means of a weapon, whereas the poet by means of the verses with the ideals of freedom.

Influenced by the call of the Communist Party of Albania for a great war, the Ethnic Greek Minority declared its participation practically since the beginning, under the slogan “Freedom is not given, it is won”. Many heroes also gave their lives for the high ideal, for the loss of which the people mourned, but also sang their heroism in verse. Let us mention on this occasion, some verses dedicated to Lefter Talo and were published in the newspaper “Our War” (May 15th, 1944):

Table 1

«Ηρώα στην πάλη, στον αγώνα	«Hero in war, and in battle
λαμπρέ αγωνιστή. Για μια ιδέα	brilliant warrior. For an idea
έπεσες – Κοιμήσου, αγνέ, νεκρέ...	you fell - Sleep, pure, dead...
Αθάνατος θα μείνεις και τιμημένος πάντα μεσ’ τις καρδιές μας.»	You will remain immortal and always honored in our hearts.»

The literary work that was published in the pages of the newspaper “Our War” was mainly the poetry and the sketches.

Of interest were even the poems of Pano Çuka, with the literary pseudonym Alqis Anthulis, which stood out for their fighting spirit, optimism and enthusiasm.

During this time a new literary genre was born, that of socialist realism. The newspaper "Our War" dedicated the 7th edition of its publication (September 24th, 1944) to this type of literary creativity, entitled "Literary publication of our war". In its main article "Hidden treasures" it was written as follows:

*"...How many young men... of the people create beautiful songs? The hidden treasures are countless. Today's revolution gives all young people the right to rise to the heights of creativity. Let's move forward to a local literary movement. Write down what you can. Today's giant war has indelible inspiration."*⁴

In the same edition, a cycle of poetry by Pano Çuka was published, consisting of seven poetries, some of which we are mentioning: "For Lefter Talo", "To the new generation", "To the youth", "Olive branch", "To our hero" etc.

Following a fragment of the poetry "To the new generation":

*«Παιδιά σου εμείς, γίγα Λαέ, δεν το κρατούμ' ακόμα
στιλέτα να σου μπήγουνε, πίσώπλατα. Στο χώμα,
-στο χώμα που το ξέρανε το ψέμμα, η αδικία
θα θεμελιώσουμε μια νια κι ωραία κοινωνία...»*
*"Your sons, mega people, will not hold you yet
stilettos to enter you, back. In the soil, -
in the soil where they knew the lie, injustice
we will establish a new and beautiful society..."*⁵

As stated above, in the years of the National Liberation War, there was no lack of cultural movement. The youth organized performances with songs, recitations of poetry and theatrical works with one act. Literary creativity, songs, dances, and the theatrical performances were an integral part of the National Liberation War. In connection with these cultural activities, an article was published in the newspaper "The voice of the partisan", as follows:

"...The partisan did not leave him in vain for a minute. As much as time allowed, theatrical performances, dramas, works of bravery, comedy, celebrating together with the people a few unforgettable hours. Such performances were given by the artistic group of our Battalion in Dhrovjan and Leshnica villages... The people did not want to leave us, they wanted to see more partisans playing and never end."

"THE WALL NEWSPAPERS"

The "Wall newspapers" played an important role in transforming the political and social consciousness of the citizens. The teacher Kosta Gaxhoni (1927 -) from Llongo village in Dropulli i Sipërm, Gjirokastra District, expressed that the 'Wall newspapers' referred to the school newspapers, and the term was borrowed from the Russian language "СТЕНГАЗЕТА",

⁴ Article titled "Hidden Treasures", newspaper "Our War", p 7, 24.9.1944.

⁵ The article entitled "In the new generation", newspaper "Our War", p 7, 24.9.1944.

in Albanian referring to “The wall newspapers” “*whose translation we necessarily borrowed in order not to use the Greek name, because there was a danger that we would be infected by the Greek monarch-fascist chauvinism (!;!)*”⁶

The topic in the “Wall newspaper” was diverse and dealt with everyday school reality issues: the economic difficulties, the progress, the assistance to the poor students, the topics regarding political and cultural interest from youth’s life, and as it may be realised its content was affected by the post-war social and political development. Furthermore, there were published many funny events from everyday life, puzzles, proverbs, and jokes about the difficulties of the Ethnic Greek Minority’s students on the way they pronounced the Albanian language.

For the publication of the “Wall newspaper” was selected a board of editors of 3-4 students, who collected the material, approved the appropriate topics, wrote them on a notebook, and then placed them in a row on a wooden frame and hanged them on the wall next door the class.

Putting in a nutshell the role of the “Wall newspaper”, we can emphasize that this edition greatly influenced the education of the school youth. At the same time, it was a tool where many students had the opportunity to show their literary skills, writing poetry, small anecdotes, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

In the newspapers of the Ethnic Greek Minority in Albania during World War II (1939-1945) and mainly in the literary sections of the newspaper «Ο Αγώνας μας»/“Our War” (1944), were created suitable conditions for a harmonious development of the literary types. The population and special readers’ categories found in the literary sections of the newspaper a variety of forms of expression, the interpretation of the material and the issues of the current time. The literary creativity published in the pages of the newspaper “Our War” was permeated by the spirit of the war time.

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