

25th Anniversary of Independence



8th September is the newest of Macedonian national holidays. It was on this date that the independence referendum was held in 1991. Then more than 95% of the voters answered "yes" to "Independent Macedonia with the right to enter in future alliances with other Yugoslav states". The Referendum Commission did not receive any complaints about irregularities or violations.

The outcome of the referendum was supported by the majority of Macedonian politicians. The Prime Minister at the time, Nikola Kljusev, said that the referendum was "the continuation of centuries-long struggle of the Macedonian people", stressing that it is up to the people to decide what kind of future state would develop, "without servant mentality and inferiority towards the rest of the ex-Yugoslav peoples". Congratulations on the

referendum came from many countries. The United States praised the moderate way and the sense of compromise in which the independence had been proclaimed.

After the referendum, the National Radio organized a celebration in response to the enthusiasm of the citizens who had already gathered in Skopje's main square. Kiro Gligorov, who went on to become president of Macedonia, greeted all the free independent citizens who had become the sovereigns of Macedonia.

The referendum took place in very turbulent times. Armed conflicts which later evolved into a civil war had already started in the territories of Slovenia and Croatia. The Hague Peace Conference and the European Community Declaration confirmed the immutability of state borders putting a ban on military means of reaching political solutions and threatened sanctions. Despite these



affirmations, there was a continued fear of how the Serbian government and the Yugoslav Army would react to the Act of Independence. Under these difficult conditions, Macedonian politicians lead by Kiro Gligorov succeeded in negotiating a peaceful retreat of the Yugoslav Army from Macedonian territory. In the following years the new democracy established a Macedonian Army, currency and sports teams to replace the earlier Yugoslav federal institutions.

The Order of Merit of 8th September has been presented to world statesmen who had contributed to the struggle for Macedonian Independence. The Bulgarian president Zelu Zelev, the German president Roman Herzog, and the Danish Foreign Minister Ufe Eleman Jensen are some of those who have been honored with it.

As two other major milestones of Macedonian Independence - the 1902 uprising against the Ottoman rule and the first session of the Anti-Fascist Assembly of the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) that proclaimed the first Macedonian nation state within the Yugoslav Federation in 1944 - fall on 2 August widely celebrated as St. Elijah's

Day, or Ilinden in Macedonian, the 8th September of 1991 is often called "the third Ilinden".

